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“Beschildert met een Glans”: Willem van Aelst and Artistic Self-Consciousness in
Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still Life Painting

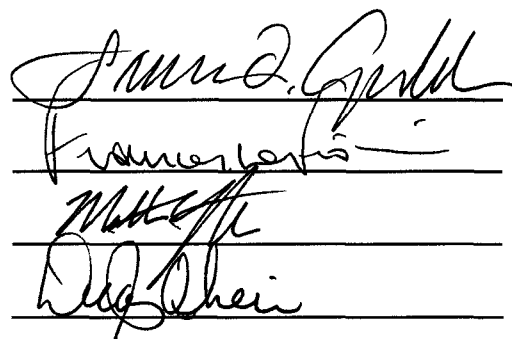
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Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Art History

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The image shows four handwritten signatures, each written on a horizontal line. From top to bottom, the signatures are: 1. A cursive signature that appears to read 'James D. Gifford'. 2. A cursive signature that appears to read 'Francis...'. 3. A cursive signature that appears to read 'M...'. 4. A cursive signature that appears to read 'D...'. The signatures are written in black ink on a white background.

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Volume I

Abstract:

In his 1718 biography of the still life painter Willem van Aelst (1627-1683), Arnold Houbraken describes the artist's grand disposition and his great pride. It is this somewhat biased biography which begins to intimate the nature not only of van Aelst's personality, but also of his work. The career of van Aelst began with an early and extended stay in France and in Italy, where he worked for the Medici. In 1656 he returned to Amsterdam, where he continued to produce his elegant paintings until his death in 1683. The paintings of van Aelst are executed in a highly refined style, with elegant contents and artful compositions. These works suggest an artist with a keen awareness of his own artistic abilities. Moreover, as he undoubtedly learned from his experience working in France and at the Medici court, the refined style and elegant contents of his paintings were precisely geared to appeal to the tastes of an elite audience. However, van Aelst's paintings were not purely well crafted objects to adorn the *voorsael*, they were complex statements of artistic virtuosity and artistic self-consciousness. Chapter one introduces the subject, situating it in the context of existing scholarship. Chapter two presents a biography of the artist, a significant addition both because it does not exist in any substantial form in any other text, and because it lays the groundwork for van Aelst's artistic development. Chapter three considers his production, the different types of still life he painted, how his work conformed to existing standards and how his work was innovative. Chapter four discusses his work in light of the patrons and collectors of his paintings. Finally chapter five draws together the strands present throughout the previous

chapters and discusses van Aelst's work in light of the concepts of artistic virtuosity and artistic self-consciousness.

For Mom and Dad

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It gives me great pleasure to thank the many people who have generously given of their time and energy to help me with this process. As I sit down to write this, and look back on just how many have assisted me, in both large and small ways, I am humbled.

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A number of scholars have helped me along the way, but I must first of all mention Sam Segal, who kindly welcomed me into his home and allowed me to consult his rich, personal archives. I remain most grateful for the generosity with which he shared his research and his extensive knowledge of still life painting.

At the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie I am most grateful for the help of Fred Meijer. His willingness to share his opinions about paintings and to discuss van Aelst in general was exceedingly helpful to me. Likewise, I am grateful for the insights of Marten Jan Bok who met with me about van Aelst and was willing not only to extend his good advice, but also his own personal research. Moreover, he put me in touch with his colleague Koenraad Jonckheere who shared with me information on van Aelst from his own personal database of auction records. I also would like to thank the staffs at the RKD, the Koninklijke Bibliotheek and the Stadsarchief Amsterdam for all of their assistance with my research. In Italy, I also extend these thanks to the staff at the Archivio di Stato di Firenze. Other friends and colleagues who have helped me in various ways throughout this process include Marianne Berardi, Jim Clifton, Tiarna Doherty, Charlotte Eyerman, Doug Hildebrecht, Mary Morton, Otto Naumann, Michelle Packer, Deborah Parker, Leslie Scattone, Scott Schaefer, Jon Seydl, Arthur Wheelock and Anne Woollett.

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Vienna, the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation and the National Gallery of Art in Washington. Particular mention should also be made of the efforts of Jana Pluharova at Zámek Vizovice in the Eastern Czech Republic. She not only offered me assistance in studying their lovely early van Aelst, but she also acted as a travel guide, assisting me in my solo travels, a fact for which I remain most grateful. I also would like to mention the numerous private collectors who showed me great hospitality in allowing me to study their paintings, as well as the dealers who provided me with photographs and transparencies. To all of these individuals, I extend my thanks.

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**Chapter 1: “The Power of the Seemingly Real:” Introduction and Review of
Literature**

One must see this picture in order to understand in what sense art is superior to nature and what the spirit of mankind imparts to objects, which it views with creative eyes. For me, at least, there is no question but that should I have the choice of the golden vessels or the picture, I would choose the picture.¹

On the corner of a table elegantly draped in white linen and deep purple velvet, a delicate drama is being played out (Figure 1). It is the interaction of things living, things dead and things animated by the now absent hands of man.

Our eyes begin in the lower right corner where the hair-like feet of a red admiral butterfly cling to the crisp white cloth, which is described in tones of blue and gray. The creature’s delicate wings are a tapestry of brown, orange and ochre. Inches above this trembling insect, on the surface of the rumpled tablecloth, sit two ruddy-shelled crabs. Both are likely dead, one evidently so, with its creamy belly in the air, the other gives the impression of life, standing on delicate pointed toes, its stalked eyes looking to the right and appearing to contemplate the blue-gray fly which has alighted nearby.

¹ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche* (Zürich: Goethestiftung für Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1949). 121 The translation I use is from Ingvar Bergström, *Dutch Still-Life Painting in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Christina Hedström and Gerald Taylor (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1983). 284-5. According to Sam Segal, *A Prosperous Past: The Sumptuous Still Life in the Netherlands 1600-1700*, ed. William B. Jordan (The Hague: SDU Publishers, 1988). 185, the Willem Kalf painting Goethe wrote about was a copy. The quotation in the title of this chapter comes from Philips Angel, "Praise of Painting," *Simiolus*, commentary, Hessel Miedema, trans. Michael Hoyle. 24, no. 2/3 (1996). 244 (page 40 in the original text). "Schijn-eyghentlicke kracht" is translated as "the power of the seemingly real" in Eric Jan Sluijter, "Introduction: 'With the Power of the Seemingly Real We Must Conquer and Capture the Eyes of Art Lovers'," in *Seductress of Sight: Studies in Dutch Art of the Golden Age* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000).1.

Our eyes are drawn from the upended crab to the crusty roll lying nearby, which possesses a golden crust and an organic, lobed shape remarkably similar to the crab's own. Beside this roll is a silver or pewter platter that holds a reflective display of fish and papery skinned onions. The fish has been chopped and partially gutted, its viscera dangling pendulously over the front of the platter. Its head, still intact, has been partly severed from its body with a vicious, curving slice that has caused delicate bones to bristle from the gaping, bloodless wound. The eye, silvery and blank, still stares.

From the slimy, reflective mound of fish we are drawn to yet another mucilaginous inhabitant of this world, a small, brown shelled snail that climbs steadily away from the fish and up the curving face of a delicately blushing, fuzzy peach. This peach is unsteadily elevated by the crusty roll and another peach that lies on the table. It is to this second peach that a small bit of branch with an array of leaves is still attached. The leaves curve from the central branch on flexible vegetal stems, while the tissue of the leaves themselves, almost puckered as it springs from the central vein, is a study in ebbing vitality. At the very highest point on the branch of peaches a woolly moth holds court with a plump furry body, bristly antlers and chalky yellow wings.

The height of the peach leaves make us aware of a multitude of large, curving grape leaves punctuated by uneven corkscrew tendrils forming eloquent gestures and pirouettes against the dark background. Nestled among these large, muscular leaves is a hazy bunch of purple grapes, catching the light and reflecting it back in their lusterless, curved surfaces. These grapes are next to the conspicuous silver-gilt base of the nautilus

cup which dominates this vivid microcosm. The base is metallic and sharply defined with coves and beads and hanging pendants. It bows out and tapers up to a delicate stem that opens out like an elaborate fan to provide support for the miraculous iridescent shell towering above the composition and making the home of the nearby snail appear comically small. The shell itself is adorned and mounted in more elaborate gold with anthropomorphic figures, rosettes and scallops. Yet the nacreous surface, striated by growth ribs and creamily iridescent, seems adornment enough.

The towering vertical shape created by the nautilus cup is continued upwards by a branch of grape vine, lopped off at an angle and revealing a tan woody core with a darker center. A fatter grape vine we have not noticed before lies in the background behind the crabs on the table and serves as a perch for a small gray mouse with pink ears and a spray of trembling whiskers.

This world is the creation of Willem van Aelst whose delicate layering of glazes has crafted forms that do not merely suggest the objects he has chosen to represent, but describe them with meticulous, dazzling precision. He is a master of detail and of careful observation. His still life paintings do not simply replicate objects but elevate them, creating for them a rarified space and a sensitively observed atmosphere. A virtuoso, he is aware at all times of the visual effects of his compositions and the objects he fills them with. He creates calculated juxtapositions, comparing crabs to rolls, snails both to fish and nautilus shells, and papery moths to delicate furry peach skin. His sensitivity results in pictures that are visually complex and opulent in character. Indeed, as the Goethe

quotation at the opening of this chapter intimates about Willem Kalf, part of the power of van Aelst's art is that his artistry results in highly desirable paintings that are as appealing as the objects they depict. In this way a painted image can transcend the physical reality it represents and become something indescribably more valuable.

The self-conscious artistry displayed in this painting is among the most conspicuous qualities of van Aelst's work, and one central goal of this dissertation is elucidating its presence and function in his oeuvre. It is precisely this focus that provides this study with a broader significance. The historical view of still life painting as a lower or less ambitious genre has unfortunately had a detrimental effect on its study in modern scholarship. Although recent work has made great strides in approaching still life from new and fruitful directions, there is still significant room for a reappraisal of the genre and its theoretical and art historical implications.² Accordingly, by acting as a case study, this dissertation on Willem van Aelst asserts the centrality of self-conscious artistry to the genre of still life as a whole. Recent trends in market and material culture studies inform portions of this argument, as do more traditional approaches to the genre that rely on investigations of seventeenth-century art-theoretical concepts and world views.

This multivalent approach I am proposing might consider the painting described at the start of this chapter in the following manner. Visually, the painting was designed to exude opulence. A number of different elements contribute to this effect including the painting's fine finish, the dark background that offsets the brilliant colors, and the elegant nautilus cup. This calculated opulence had at least three primary goals. The first was to

² The specific literature on still life and its reception is discussed below in the review of literature.

produce a painting that would have been valued as highly as the objects it depicted. The second was to provide a vehicle for the demonstration of van Aelst's artistic virtuosity. The third was to create a painting of refined technique and elegant subject matter that would have appealed to a market of collectors whose lifestyles, tastes and possessions would have been complemented by such an opulent display. The presence of the nautilus cup adds a layer of complexity in this regard, because it may be pleasingly reflective of similar objects a collector already owned; or it may speak to aspirations of financial success; or it may be appreciated solely for its artistry, as in Goethe's consideration of Kalf. The painting also contains some anomalous elements such as the fish, which seem to contradict the deliberate opulence of the painting. By turning to the study of seventeenth-century notions of paradox and the specifically seventeenth-century Dutch idea of *schilderachtigheid* (usually translated as picturesque), we can interpret the fish as a motif designed to emphasize the artistry of van Aelst. To paint a beautiful object like a nautilus cup or even a peach beautifully was simply an exercise in mimetic ability. To paint something as unseemly as a partially gutted fish in a beautiful manner truly was a demonstration of artistic skill. Finally, the painting contains a number of correspondences and juxtapositions, such as the formal relationship between the crab and the roll, the textural relationships between the fuzz of the peaches, the moth and the velvet as well as the appealing contrast of scale between the monumental nautilus and the minute snail shell. These sensitively observed effects result in a painting that is visually rich and that rewards consistent and prolonged study, something that a seventeenth-century *liefhebber*

(connoisseur) would have appreciated. Moreover it provides an opportunity for van Aelst to display his ability to successfully render a range of different textures, a skill specifically defined in art theoretical texts as a marker of artistic ability.³

This reading of van Aelst's painting does not seek one unified theory or meaning, rather it attempts to access the range of connotation and association that the painting could have had in Dutch Golden Age culture. Such an approach is the most useful way to understand still life paintings because it is not exclusive in nature. For this reason, this technique of interpretation or reading of paintings can be applied more broadly, beyond the confines of the genre of still life painting.⁴

This dissertation also focuses on the provision and analysis of van Aelst's biography, his painted oeuvre and his painting technique. These aspects of the dissertation are crucial because despite his accomplishments as a painter and his importance for the development of the genre of still life painting, a thorough biography of van Aelst and a comprehensive study of his paintings do not exist. Fundamental to this dissertation has been the careful, first-hand examination of many of van Aelst's paintings,

³ Van Mander discusses these issues at great length. For instance, on the importance of the ability to distinguish between different types of fabric alone: Karel van Mander, *Den Grondt der Edel Vrij schilder-konst*, trans. Hessel Miedema, 2 vols. (Utrecht: Haentjens Dekker & Gumbert, 1973). Vol. 1, 237 (in the original text this is chapter 10, fol. 42v); In his 1642 speech Philips Angel also emphasizes the importance of this ability Angel, "Praise." 242 (page 34 of the original text).

⁴ The interest in a more all-encompassing approach to the interpretation of paintings, one that takes into account their "selectivity and multiplicity of reference" is inspired by the work of Larry Goedde, in particular Lawrence O. Goedde, *Tempest and Shipwreck in Dutch and Flemish Art: Convention, Rhetoric and Interpretation* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989). And more specifically on still life painting Lawrence O. Goedde, "A Little World Made Cunningly: Dutch Still Life and *Ekphrasis*," in *Still Lives of the Golden Age: The Heinz Family Collection* (Washington: The National Gallery of Art, 1989).

which has resulted in a number of new discoveries leading to a greater understanding of van Aelst's technique and style.

In addition to demonstrating the centrality of self-aware artistry to van Aelst's work, producing a biography and defining an oeuvre, there are a number of other concerns that are central to this dissertation. The first of these relates to the foreign travel that van Aelst undertook in his youth. In studying his oeuvre and the events of his life, it becomes clear that his early travel and work both in Italy and France had a profound effect on his paintings and on his perception of himself. Indeed, van Aelst actively capitalized on his period abroad, effectively advertising it through his Italian signature and other motifs that would have appealed to a market of collectors who were attracted by this exotic pedigree. The notion of foreign travel and training and how it related to the art market is therefore an important subject for this study. A second major concern of the dissertation is intimately related to the first. Willem van Aelst, through the choices he made in terms of allusions to his foreign travel, the objects he included in his still lifes, his technique, and the compositions he created, actively composed paintings designed to appeal to an elite consumer. Study of his life experience shows that at an early age he became keenly aware of the market for paintings and the difference that such seemingly trivial elements as pigment choice, pictorial finish and subject matter could have on the appeal of his paintings to consumers in the Dutch marketplace. In this light, ostensibly minor choices take on a much greater import, and it becomes clear that van Aelst's paintings not only invited close and extended scrutiny in the past but warrant it now.

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction and a review of literature. This chapter provides a framework and a context for the dissertation. Moreover, it draws out some of the larger implications of the subsequent chapters, which function as focused case studies. The review of literature considers the sources that have informed, inspired and stimulated the dissertation and is organized roughly by subject area.

Chapter two is a biography of Willem van Aelst, which in the absence of a thorough life of the artist, makes this chapter a crucial contribution to the scholarship. The chapter is organized chronologically into sections corresponding to van Aelst's periods in Delft, France, Italy and Amsterdam. The section on Delft discusses his early training and his family, as well as motivations for foreign travel. The part on France explores what is known about the first portion of his travels. Here new information is presented about his possible contacts in France, and about the renown he apparently achieved there. In the section on Italy the main focus is on his work for the Medici. Letters from the Florentine archives make it possible to deduce the contours of his experiences there. Finally the Amsterdam section studies the height of his fame. Notarial documents illuminate portions of this section. For each of the sections of the chapter, one or two paintings are discussed that give a sense of his artistic development at the time.

Chapter three considers the work of Willem van Aelst. While the end of the dissertation features an appended checklist of paintings by Willem van Aelst, this chapter also considers the different types of still lifes van Aelst produced, how each type related

to similar works by other artists and the original contributions van Aelst made to the genre. Additionally, the artists who influenced van Aelst as well as artists he both taught and influenced are considered in this context. The chapter is divided into sections corresponding to the varied sub-genres in which he painted: the flower piece, the fruit piece, the hunt piece, the forest floor still life, the fish piece and the *pronk*, or luxury display still life. As in the previous chapter, examples of paintings are discussed with each section, wherever possible these are works that I have been able to examine first-hand.

Chapter four is divided into two distinct sections but broadly examines questions of collectors and the market. The first half of the chapter deals with the collectors of van Aelst's paintings and the manner in which he tailored his paintings to suit the tastes and interests of individual patrons. Because the most specific information exists for van Aelst's time working for the Medici, the study of his production for them will form the first part of the chapter. The approach that van Aelst adopted in his work for the Medici is then taken as a model and compared to what I have been able to infer from information that exists for his period in Amsterdam. Wherever possible I have used primary source material in the form of inventories and the content and presentation of paintings themselves to make inferences about the manner in which van Aelst approached the potential buyers of his paintings. The second half of chapter four considers a conspicuous group of paintings in van Aelst's oeuvre. These images include both multiple versions of the same painting, as well as subtly evolving depictions of the same subject matter. This

section considers the implications of multiple versions of compositions and how van Aelst dealt with the necessity to produce a volume of paintings while still maintaining his artistic reputation.

Chapter five studies motifs of artistic virtuosity in Willem van Aelst's oeuvre. The chapter is divided into sections by motif. The first is the reflected self-portrait found in three still lifes dating from the same year. These are the only reflected self-portraits in van Aelst's body of work. Accordingly, their timing and van Aelst's motivation in painting them are likely significant. The second section considers the implications of van Aelst's distinctive signature. Not only is van Aelst's signature large and prominent in his paintings, but it takes the form of elaborate calligraphy, and after his return from Italy, van Aelst begins using the Italian form of his first name. The third section examines instances of artistic rivalry in van Aelst's paintings. This section centers around a relief sculpture originally created in silver by the talented silversmith Paulus van Vianen that van Aelst appropriated and translated into stone in a number of his paintings. Additionally, van Aelst's signature on a French medal by Jean Warin is discussed in this context. The fourth and final section of this chapter discusses van Aelst's fish paintings as visual manifestations of the paradoxical encomium. Van Aelst's innovative fish pieces and their larger implications are discussed along with the theoretical concepts of *sprezzatura*, *schilderachtigheid*, and *difficultá*. This chapter is the culmination of the arguments which have run throughout the dissertation and is therefore one of the most significant theoretical chapters in this study.

The final section of the dissertation is a checklist of paintings by Willem van Aelst. Once again, as with his biography, such a list does not exist and is therefore a fundamental part of the dissertation. The list was developed from work in a number of photographic archives including those at the Getty Research Institute, the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie in The Hague and the personal archive of Dr. Sam Segal in Amsterdam. The combination of the study of these archives, along with information on paintings that surfaced recently with dealers, in particular Otto Naumann, Richard Green and Johnny van Haefen, has resulted in a checklist that is as thorough as I am able to achieve. The next logical step would be the production of a formal catalog raisonné.

Review of Literature

The modern art-historical literature which deals specifically with van Aelst is at once broad and relatively cursory, either rehearsing basic biographical information, or focusing on stylistic discussions of specific paintings in the context of exhibition catalogs and survey texts. In general, the biographical information that appears most often seems to have come from Dirk van Bleyswijk's entry on van Aelst in his 1667 text on Delft, as well as from Arnold Houbraken's 1718 *Lives of the Dutch Arist.*⁵ Houbraken's text also yields additional information on van Aelst in his accounts of other artists. The life of

⁵ Dirck van Bleyswijk, *Beschryvinge der stad Delft* (Delft: Arnold Bon, Boeckverkooper, 1667). vol I, 855-856; Arnold Houbraken, *De Grootte schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam: B.M. Israël, 1976). vol I, 228-230. These early biographies are reproduced and discussed at length in chapter two so it is not necessary to discuss them in detail here.

Maria van Oosterwijk offers the particularly well known tale of van Aelst's ultimately frustrated infatuation with the female artist.⁶ Moreover, the life of Otto Marseus van Schrieck reveals the friendship of the two artists, and the life of Ernst Stuven tells how van Aelst was one of the young artist's teachers.⁷ These early biographies provided many basic details that appear in subsequent authors' biographies of the artist. Fundamental features of the accounts include Willem van Aelst's apprenticeship with his uncle Evert van Aelst; the assertion that van Aelst was in France for four years and Italy for seven; the assertion that while abroad his work was sought out by Cardinals, Dukes and other noblemen; the date of his return to Amsterdam in 1656 as well as his subsequent success there. These basic biographical details are recounted in entries on van Aelst found in subsequent artist biographies such as those by Jan Campo Weyerman and J.-B. Descamps.⁸ Texts such as these and later iterations like P.J. Mariette's eighteenth-century *Abecedario* form the basis for biographies of van Aelst found in modern art historical literature.⁹

Other early sources, such as Gerard Hoet's publications of early auction results, as well as F.D.O. Obreen's collections of early documents also contain further information

⁶ Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol. 2, 216-218.

⁷ Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol. 1, 356, Vol. 3, 372.

⁸ Jan Campo Weyerman, *De levens-beschryvingen der Nederlandsche konst-schilders en konst-schilderessen* (The Hague: 1729-69). Vol. 2, 17-18.; J. B. Descamps, *La vie des peintres Flamands et Hollandais*, 4 vols. (Paris: 1753-63). Vol. 1, 277-278.

⁹ P.J. Mariette, *Abecedario et autres notes inédits de cet amateur sur les arts et les artistes* (Paris: 1851-53). Vol. 1, 9-10.

on van Aelst.¹⁰ Both of these texts are invaluable for the understanding of van Aelst's biography because they provide rich selections of archival information.

Perhaps the most reliable and abundant source of primary documentary material on van Aelst can be found in the many publications of Abraham Bredius, including his *Künstler-Inventäre*.¹¹ This eight-volume work is particularly useful in finding inventories that contained paintings by van Aelst. Bredius also published an article devoted to van Aelst in 1937 which provides some of the fundamental archival information necessary for writing the history of van Aelst's life in Amsterdam.¹² Equally useful in this regard were the articles he published in *Oud Holland* that detailed events in which van Aelst participated, as well as information on the lives of painters or other individuals with whom he interacted.¹³

In the early part of the twentieth-century the only publications on van Aelst, aside from the work of Bredius, were survey texts of either Dutch art or still life painting. Of

¹⁰ Gerard Hoet, *Catalogus of naamlyst van schilderyen met derselver pryzen*, 3 vols. (s'Gravenhage: 1752; reprint, 1976). A number of different auctions featuring van Aelst's work are reprinted in this volume, some with remarkably high prices, such as an April 9, 1687 auction in which a van Aelst sold for 400 *fl*, the most expensive painting of the 117 sold that day. Vol. 1, 5-10.; F. D. O. Obreen, *Archief voor Nederlandse kunstgeschiedenis*, 7 vols. (Rotterdam: 1877-90). This volume is equally useful in this regard.

¹¹ Abraham Bredius, *Künstler-Inventare: Urkunden zur geschichte der Holländischen kunst des XVIIten, XVIIIten und XVIIIten jahrhunderts*, 8 vols. (1921). Multiple inventories containing van Aelst's work can be found throughout these volumes.

¹² Abraham Bredius, "Archiefsprokkelingen: Enkele gegevens over Willem van Aelst," *Oud Holland* LIV, no. I-VI (1937).

¹³ Abraham Bredius, "Italiaansche schilderijen in 1672 door Amsterdamsche en Haagsche schilders beoordeeld," *Oud Holland*, no. IV (1886). This text describes the judgment of Gerrit Uylenburgh's Italian paintings which van Aelst took part in; Abraham Bredius, "Drie Delftse schilders: Evert van Aelst, Pieter Jansz van Asch en Adam Pick," *Oud Holland*, no. 12 (1894). This article was useful both for the information it provided on Willem's teacher and uncle, Evert van Aelst, but also for the information on Adam Pick, another one of Evert's students and a person with whom van Aelst interacted when he returned from abroad; Abraham Bredius, "Archiefsprokkelingen, een en ander over Maria van Oosterwyk, "vermaert Konstschilderesse"," *Oud Holland* LII, no. I-IV (1935). This article details the strife between Willem van Aelst's and Maria van Oosterwijk's maids.

the latter, perhaps the earliest was that by Warner originally published in 1928.¹⁴ Warner is quite positive towards van Aelst, calling him “the aristocrat of still life painters,” referring to the dignity of his pictures and suggesting that even the insects in his paintings have a “cultured grace” about them.¹⁵ Yet, Warner’s book, although very significant in its time, consisted primarily of pictures with captions of varying lengths and did not go into any great detail about van Aelst, despite its positive tone.

One year later, in 1929, E. Zarnowska contributed a volume on Dutch still life.¹⁶ Once again, the picture of van Aelst is a positive one. Like Warner, Zarnowska categorizes van Aelst’s style as aristocratic; moreover she credits him for his influential use of glazes in his paintings.¹⁷

In 1947, two books on Dutch still life were published, one by R. van Luttervelt in the Netherlands, the other by Ingvar Bergström in Sweden, with slightly different portraits of van Aelst.¹⁸ Bergström’s useful survey was not translated into English until 1956, so its impact was not widely felt until some years later. This meant that van Luttervelt’s survey, which presented van Aelst as a relatively minor figure, was the dominant view for some years. In the section on *pronk* still life painting in Luttervelt’s book, van Aelst is placed firmly in the shadow of Willem Kalf. Van Aelst’s painting is noted for its decorative effects, but in the author’s estimation, it pales in comparison with

¹⁴ R. Warner, *Dutch and Flemish Flower and Fruit Painters of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries* (Amsterdam: B. M. Israel, 1928). The most telling passage on van Aelst is on page 15.

¹⁵ Warner, *Dutch*. 15.

¹⁶ E. Zarnowska, *La nature-morte hollandaise. Les principaux représentants, ses origines, son influence* (Brussels-Maastricht: 1929).

¹⁷ Zarnowska, *La nature-morte*. xxiv

¹⁸ Bergström, *Dutch.*; R. van Luttervelt, *Schilders van het Stilleven* (Naarden: Uitgeverij "In de Toren", 1947).

the *pronk* still life paintings of Kalf.¹⁹ In van Luttermvelt's section on Hunt paintings, van Aelst is described somewhat more favorably. He is once again noted for his decorative effects, his paintings are described as cool and highly distinguished and van Luttermvelt noted how van Aelst treats his game more like valuable objects than dead animals.²⁰ Finally, in the section on flower painting, van Aelst is credited with the development of the asymmetrical flower piece, although van Luttermvelt incorrectly states that van Aelst worked for Queen Marie de Medici in France.²¹ While van Luttermvelt's description of van Aelst is not wholly negative, it is clear that, despite his prominence and stylistic importance, he is placed unequivocally in a lower class of painters.

In 1956, Bergström's classic still life survey was published in English for the first time, and the fullest account of van Aelst in modern art history was presented to a wide audience. Despite a fuller and more positive account of van Aelst's painting and his life, Bergström still places him beneath other painters. For instance, the first mention of van Aelst is in a chapter devoted to Jan Davidsz. de Heem. Although van Aelst's work shares some common elements with de Heem, it is not clear that van Aelst is most profitably classed in relation to de Heem. Despite this organizational issue, however, Bergström illustrates four van Aelst paintings in this chapter and discusses his biography as well as his style in a sensitive manner.²² Bergström's section on hunt painting also includes a paragraph on van Aelst, and illustrates the striking hunt piece in the Nationalmuseum,

¹⁹ Luttermvelt, *Schilders*. 60

²⁰ Luttermvelt, *Schilders*. 68

²¹ Luttermvelt, *Schilders*. 115.

²² Bergström, *Dutch*. The section on van Aelst is found on pages 220-224.

Stockholm.²³ Finally, van Aelst is discussed once again in the chapter that Bergström devotes to Willem Kalf. Only one of van Aelst's paintings is discussed in this chapter, once again a painting in Stockholm, in this instance a 1657 breakfast piece.²⁴ It is indeed true that this painting is intimately related to the work of Kalf in this period. Not only do they share some compositional affinities, but van Aelst's painting depicts a lidded silver pitcher that can also be found in one of Kalf's still lifes.²⁵ However, van Aelst's painting can also profitably be viewed independently from Kalf's, and certainly he contributed many unique elements to the sub-genre of the *pronk* still life that Bergström does not wholly recognize. Nevertheless, this publication is one of the earliest, full discussions of van Aelst's life and paintings in modern art historical literature.

Walther Bernt's multi-volume survey of Dutch painters, published in 1948, also includes several paintings by van Aelst.²⁶ Bernt describes van Aelst's paintings as carefully considered and clearly composed. He also notes, as many previous authors had, that van Aelst's coloration is silvery, however Bernt also suggests that van Aelst's painting style and coloring bear much in common with fine painting.²⁷ Bernt's brief biography of van Aelst notes that Rachel Ruysch was his student and that the work of William Gowe Ferguson draws much from van Aelst's. In its brevity, Bernt's account bears much in common with those found in earlier authors. Because of its focus on minor

²³ Bergström, *Dutch*. 256-257.

²⁴ Bergström, *Dutch*. 285-286.

²⁵ The Kalf still life that has the same pitcher is in the collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

²⁶ Walther Bernt, *Die Niederländischen Maler des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1948). Vol. 1, nos. 3-5.

²⁷ Bernt, *Niederländischer*. Vol. 1, nos. 3-5.

masters of still life and landscape, the 1969 book by Laurens J. Bol mentions van Aelst largely as an artist who served as a model for other lesser painters. In addition to a section on the followers of van Aelst, Bol includes brief discussions of van Aelst in sections on the hunt still life and the forest floor still life.²⁸

In 1982, Eddy de Jongh's catalogue, *Still Life in the Age of Rembrandt*, included two still lifes by van Aelst and catalogue entries that are important in that they discuss van Aelst in his own right, instead of in the shadow of another, ostensibly greater artist.²⁹ Moreover, de Jongh's entries include much more developed biographical information.³⁰

Perhaps no author has been as important for the reconsideration of van Aelst as a significant, independent painter as Sam Segal. His multiple publications, beginning in 1982 with *A Flowery Past*, and continuing in 1983 and 1989 with *A Fruitful Past* and *A Prosperous Past*, provide broad surveys of sub-genres of Dutch still life painting and within each catalogue van Aelst is given a place.³¹ Unlike earlier authors Segal does not place van Aelst in chapters devoted to other artists, a tendency that has had the effect of marginalizing van Aelst. Instead, Segal contextualizes van Aelst, placing him in a chapter dealing with the still lifes from the latter half of the seventeenth-century and recognizing the importance of van Aelst's paintings for later artists like Jan van Huysum.

²⁸ Laurens J. Bol, *Holländische Maler des 17. Jahrhunderts Nahe den grossen Meistern Landschaften und Stilleben* (Braunschweig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1969). 269, 306-316, 317-18.

²⁹ Eddy de Jongh et al., *Still-Life in the Age of Rembrandt* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1982).

³⁰ Jongh et al., *Still-Life*. 74-77, 150-151.

³¹ Sam Segal, *A Flowery Past: A Survey of Dutch and Flemish Flower Painting from 1600 until the Present* (Amsterdam: Gallery P. de Boer, 1982).; Sam Segal, *A Fruitful Past: A Survey of the Fruit Still Lifes of the Northern and Southern Netherlands from Brueghel Till van Gogh* (Amsterdam: Gallery P. de Boer, 1983).; Sam Segal, *A Prosperous Past: The Sumptuous Still Life in the Netherlands 1600-1700* (The Hague: SDU Publishers, 1989).

Scott Sullivan's book on Dutch game still lifes provided an important reconsideration of one of the most significant sub-genres of still life painting.³² Sullivan gives full attention to the notable contributions that van Aelst made to this sub-genre. Moreover, he provides an extensive biography of van Aelst and presents stylistic discussions of six of van Aelst's paintings.³³ Sullivan's text is most significant for its recognition of the marked grandeur that van Aelst introduced to the hunt still life, a characteristic that helped divorce it fully from the early kitchen still lifes that formed its origins.

Having been identified as a painter of significance in the second half of the twentieth-century, van Aelst has slowly become a fixture in survey texts on Dutch art, and is increasingly prominent in surveys and exhibitions of Dutch still life.³⁴ Catalogues of museum collections that contain van Aelst paintings have also become significant conveyors of information on the artist. Among the most noteworthy of these are the catalogues of the National Gallery in Washington, the Staatliches Museum in Schwerin, The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, The Royal Collection in London, the Mauritshuis in The Hague and the Galleria Palatina in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence.³⁵

³² Scott A. Sullivan, *The Dutch Gamepiece* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld Publishers, 1984).

³³ Sullivan, *Gamepiece*. 52-54, figures 100-105.

³⁴ In Seymour Slive's ubiquitous survey, van Aelst receives a paragraph and one illustration in the marginalized section on still life painting. Seymour Slive, *Dutch Painting 1600-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). 290. In the important 1999 still life exhibition, van Aelst seems to have finally found his place and is represented by three paintings with substantial entries in the catalogue. Alan Chong and Walter Klock, eds., *Still-Life Paintings From the Netherlands 1550-1720* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1999). 242-248, entries number 60-62.

³⁵ Arthur K. Wheelock, *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth-Century* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, Oxford University Press, 1995).; Kornelia von Berswordt-Wallrabe, *Stilleben des Goldenen Zeitalters Die Schweriner Sammlung* (Schwerin: Staatliches Museum Schwerin, 2000).; Fred G. Meijer, *The Collection of*

Exhibition catalogues also form an increasingly significant part of the literature on van Aelst. In addition to the 1999 Dutch still life exhibition organized by Alan Chong, a number of exhibitions in recent years featured paintings by Willem van Aelst. These include the 1991 exhibition by Ben Broos, *Great Dutch Paintings in America*, and the 2001 Vermeer exhibition organized by Walter Liedtke, which featured a number of early van Aelst paintings.³⁶ Finally, although not an exhibition catalogue, the 1995, three-volume survey of Dutch still life painters produced by Erika Gemar-Koeltzsch is also notable in presenting an annotated list of fifty-one paintings by van Aelst, the closest approach to a checklist of paintings that had been produced at the time.³⁷

The Interpretation of Still Life

In order to think constructively about the connotations and associations of Willem van Aelst's paintings in Dutch Golden Age culture it is important to understand the

Dutch and Flemish Still-Life Paintings Bequeathed by Daisy Linda Ward, The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Zwolle: Waanders, 2003).; Christopher White, *The Dutch Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).; Peter van der Ploeg; Quentin Buvelot, ed., *Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis: A Princely Collection* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2006).; Marco Chiarini, *Galerie e musei statali di Firenze: I dipinti olandese del seicento e del settecento* (Rome: Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione Servizio Pubblicazioni, 1989).

³⁶ Ben Broos, *Great Dutch Paintings From America* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1991).; Walter Liedtke, *Vermeer and the Delft School*, ed. New York The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

³⁷ Erika Gemar-Koeltzsch, *Luca Bild-Lexicon: Holländische Stillebenmaler im 17. Jahrhundert*, 3 vols. (Lingen: Luca Verlag, 1995). The checklist of van Aelst's paintings is in volume 2, 14-29. It should also be noted that a master's thesis on van Aelst was produced in 2007 at The University of Utrecht under the supervision of Peter Hecht. Because the research for this dissertation was finished when this thesis appeared I will not cite it in my text, but mention it here to recognize the efforts of the student. Matthijs van der Mede, "Willem van Aelst 1626-1683 Leven, werk en reputatiegeschiedenis " (University of Utrecht, 2007).

interpretive approaches that have dominated the literature on the genre of still life painting as a whole. This interpretive history is largely mirrored in the interpretive approaches that have predominated in the study of Dutch art in general. Broadly these include an early emphasis on Dutch naturalism coupled with an interest in the description and classification of style, followed by the strong influence of the iconographic method and then a later, complex movement away from it.

The earliest approaches to Dutch still life painting are based overwhelmingly on the assumption of realism that characterizes the approach to Dutch art by nineteenth-century writers like Eugène Fromentin.³⁸ In his discussion of the subject in Dutch art Fromentin observed that “One thing strikes you when studying the moral foundation of Dutch art, and that is the total absence of what we now call a subject... [The Dutch School] was content to look around it, and to dispense with imagination.”³⁹ This underlying assumption of realism resulted in a greater interest in the description and classification of style, because meaning was thought to be relatively self-evident. These accounts in modern scholarship are largely descriptive, and appear primarily in the context of exhibition catalogues. For instance, in *La Nature-morte hollandaise*, E. Zarnowska limits her discussion of still life to an introductory survey of the development of still life painting using the images from the exhibition as illustrations.⁴⁰ She subdivides the text broadly by type including sections on monochrome painters and Italianists. The

³⁸ Eugène Fromentin, *Les Maitres d'autrefois: Belgique Hollande* (Paris: E. Plon et C^{ie}, 1876).

³⁹ Fromentin, *Maitres*. 193. The translation quoted above comes from Eugène Fromentin, *The Old Masters of Belgium and Holland* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963). 146.

⁴⁰ Zarnowska, *La nature-morte*.

primary concern of the work is fairly traditional, attempting to distinguish style and stylistic influence. To this end, Zarnowska examines the paintings with great attention to visual qualities such as color and brushstroke, and this descriptive tendency makes this text and others like it useful for this study. The close attention to details of color, style and composition evokes the highly contrived nature of still life paintings and the artistic self-consciousness involved in crafting them. Other early treatments of still life such as Wilhelm von Bode's *Die Meister der holländischen und vlämischen Malerschulen* exhibit this same focus on and interest in a descriptive treatment of paintings with the traditional goal of classification of style and type.⁴¹ Willem Martin's early survey of Dutch painting provides descriptions especially sensitive to the nuance and subtlety of these images.⁴² Although sometimes enlightening, the exclusively descriptive approach often proves limiting in its narrow scope.

The iconographic method, and especially the concept of disguised symbolism, first introduced by Erwin Panofsky and Charles de Tolnay in the 1930's, became an increasingly important approach to Dutch still life painting from the 1940's onward.⁴³ In

⁴¹ Wilhelm von Bode, *Die Meister der holländischen und vlämischen Malerschulen* (Leipzig: 1917). Bode focuses on three major artists, Jan Davidsz. de Heem, Abraham van Beyeren and Willem Kalf. His interest is certainly descriptive, but not quite as oriented towards classification. For his approach more broadly see Wilhelm von Bode, *Rembrandt und seine Zeitgenossen* (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1906). For other examples of the early descriptive approach to still life painting see Jacques Goudstikker, *Catalogus der tentoonstelling het stilleven ten bate de Vereeniging Rembrandt* (Amsterdam: den Kunsthandel, 1933).; H. E. van Gelder, *W. C. Heda, A. van Beyeren and W. Kalf* (Amsterdam: H. J. W. Becht, 1941).; Warner, *Dutch*.

⁴² Wilhelm Martin, *De hollandsche schilderkunst in de zeventiende eeuw*, 2 vols., vol. 1: Frans Hals en zijn tijd 2: Rembrandt en zijn tijd (Amsterdam: J. M. Meulenhof, 1935-6).

⁴³ Erwin Panofsky, "Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait," *The Burlington Magazine* 64 (1934). See also Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting, Its Origins and Character* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953). Especially chapter V, pp. 131-148. Charles de Tolnay, *Le Maître de Flémalle et les frères Van Eyck* (Brussels: Éditions de la Connaissance, 1938).

Panofsky's 1934 article on Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait*, he questions whether the painting is a realistic interior, wondering "whether the patient enthusiasm bestowed upon this marvelous interior anticipates the modern principle of "*l'art pour l'art*," so to speak, or is still rooted to some extent in the medieval tendency of investing visible objects with an allegorical or symbolical meaning."⁴⁴ What is significant in Panofsky's account, is that the symbolism of the painting is not overt, in fact, the symbolic elements are embedded as realistic objects within the painting. Therefore the single burning candle in the chandelier symbolizes important aspects of the marriage ceremony, as well as simply being a candle.⁴⁵ In this way Panofsky proposes the existence of a disguised symbolism within the painting, the union of medieval symbolism with modern realism.⁴⁶

In his survey of Dutch still life of 1956 Ingvar Bergström applied the concept of iconographic interpretation to still life painting, an approach especially evident in his chapter on *vanitas* paintings.⁴⁷ Bergström all the more readily adopted the method proposed by Panofsky because he saw religious painting as one of the primary sources for still life.⁴⁸ Because his book provides one of the most comprehensive studies of Dutch still life painting, a majority of the text is devoted to the descriptive, classificatory

⁴⁴ Panofsky, "Jan van Eyck's." 126.

⁴⁵ Panofsky, "Jan van Eyck's." 126

⁴⁶ Panofsky, "Jan van Eyck's." 127

⁴⁷ Bergström, *Dutch*. 154-190. Bergström's chapter on *vanitas* paintings was undoubtedly influenced by N. R. A. Vroom, *De schilders van het monochrome banketje* (Amsterdam: N. v. uitgevers-mij "Kosmos", 1945). See also the much revised translation N. R. A. Vroom, *A Modest Message as Intimated by the Painters of the "Monochrome Banketje"* (Schiedam: Interbook International, 1980).

⁴⁸ Bergström, *Dutch*. 1-41 for his theory on the origins of still life. See also Ingvar Bergström, "Disguised Symbolism in "Madonna" Pictures and Still Life," *The Burlington Magazine* 97, no. October, November (1955). In this article he argues for the direct transmission of meaning from fruit and flowers depicted in Madonna paintings to fruit and flowers depicted in independent still life paintings.

analysis typical of earlier twentieth-century scholarship. Although Bergström proves to be a sensitive observer of style and composition, he does not frequently question or analyze these characteristics.

As is frequently the case with iconographic interpretation, there is a tendency in Bergström's work to assess still life paintings as if they were groupings of real objects and not paintings. To this end the meanings of individual objects depicted in paintings are determined with minimal consideration of other amplifying factors such as style, size, prominence and composition. Moreover, a single object is frequently used to determine the meaning of an entire painting. Bergström's "Excursus: The pocket-watch as a symbol of temperance" especially exemplifies this tendency.⁴⁹ In this brief section he suggests that the pocket watch, so frequently found in breakfast and banquet pieces, is a caution towards moderation. He bases this interpretation on emblems and on a Jan Davidsz. de Heem painting with the inscription "Modicum et Bonum." From these sources alone he suggests that this reading can be applied to all breakfast pieces containing pocket watches.⁵⁰ This conclusion exemplifies the tendency in iconographic readings to interpret paintings object by object and on the basis of a partial grasp of the wider potential significance of objects in Dutch culture.

Certainly this approach to interpretation is a problematic one as it fails to take into account the variable nature of paintings and operates under the inherent assumption that paintings function like emblems. Moreover, this method has also tended not to examine

⁴⁹ Bergström, *Dutch*. 189-190. This section forms the close of the *vanitas* chapter

⁵⁰ Bergström, *Dutch*. 190.

the variety of possible interpretations of objects found in emblematic sources. For instance, Julie Berger Hochstrasser recently suggested that the pocket watch in an Abraham van Beyeren painting might be a reminder of both the time the artist had invested in the careful creation of his painting and the ability of a painting to stop time.⁵¹ In support of this she notes the proximity of the watch to a painted reflection of the artist in a silver pitcher, a motif expressing intense artistic self-consciousness.⁵² Similarly, the examination of a pocket watch in a Willem van Aelst painting might also take into account his fine painting style, noting the value placed on such a style.⁵³ An interpretation that takes into account not only the composition and content of the painting, but also its fine, polished technique suggests that the image carries pronounced implications of artistic virtuosity in Dutch culture. In this context, the pocket watch does not necessarily warn the viewer to be moderate, but rather acts as an exemplar of artistry and mimetic skill.⁵⁴ An iconographic reading that treats still life paintings as collections of discrete objects and not carefully crafted wholes should be approached with caution. All aspects of a painting need to be considered, always with an awareness of the meticulously constructed and ultimately fictitious nature of Dutch still life.

⁵¹ Julie Berger Hochstrasser, "Feasting the Eye: Painting and Reality in the Seventeenth-Century *Bancketje*," in *Still Life Paintings from the Netherlands 1550-1720*, ed. Alan Chong (Zwolle: Waanders, 1999), 81-2.

⁵² On this motif see Celeste Brusati, "Stilled Lives: Self Portraiture and Self-Reflection in Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Still-Life Painting," *Simiolus* 20 (1990-91).

⁵³ Maria-Isabel Pousão-Smith, "Sprezzatura, Nettigheid and the Fallacy of 'Invisible Brushwork' in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 54 (2003).

⁵⁴ The method I have applied here builds on Hochstrasser's reading of the painting to provide access to frequently overlooked and under-interpreted aspects of a painting. In this case my ultimate conclusion is similar to Hochstrasser's but adds another layer of complexity to the reading. Furthermore, one could also examine the type of watch being painted and what kind of value it might possess.

The work of Eddy de Jongh, based ultimately on Panofsky's pioneering theories, is most responsible for applying iconographic interpretation to seventeenth-century Dutch art.⁵⁵ His concept of "schijnrealisme," or seeming realism, is intimately related to the idea of disguised symbolism introduced by Panofsky. Like Panofsky, de Jongh operates under the assumption that Dutch seventeenth-century viewers would have initially perceived paintings as appealing depictions of reality. The appeal that the paintings had would cause the viewers to want to study the paintings more closely and through this more careful scrutiny they would discover the message of the painting. Unlike Panofsky, who informed his interpretations through historical exploration of visual symbols, de Jongh related this doctrine of instruction and delight to a number of different seventeenth-century literary sources such as emblems, prints with inscriptions and the texts produced by contemporary *rederijkers* (rhetoricians). De Jongh did this because he felt that these sources would provide a better insight into the seventeenth-century mentality than paintings would. Accordingly, de Jongh describes a mentality that tended towards moralizing and had a preference for veiling and ambiguity. This perceived mentality enabled de Jongh to ascribe a moralizing message to such apparently contrary scenes as Jan Steen's raucous images of dissolute households. The approach proposed by de Jongh has yielded many striking insights into seventeenth-century Dutch culture and painting, yet it does possess some problematic aspects. Indeed, subsequent

⁵⁵ See for instance Eddy de Jongh, "Realism and Seeming Realism in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting," in *Looking at Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered*, ed. Wayne Franits (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). This essay is one of the clearest delineations of the approach and originally appeared in Dutch as Eddy de Jongh, "Realisme en schijnrealisme in de Hollandse schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw," in *Rembrandt en zijn tijd* (Brussels: Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, 1971).

texts by authors like Eric Jan Sluijter and Peter Hecht questioned the broad applicability of his approach and some authors, like Svetlana Alpers, dismissed it outright.⁵⁶

De Jongh's method, much like Panofsky's, rests on the assumption that seventeenth-century Dutch paintings would have initially been perceived by contemporary viewers as broadly representative of reality. Yet, what critics have pointed out is that study of these paintings reveals that they depict a selective reality, and a study and understanding of why certain things are depicted and not others yields insights into the paintings that emblems and other external sources cannot provide.⁵⁷ Another aspect of De Jongh's method that is distinctly problematic, however, is his contention that typical "realistic" Dutch paintings are actually "gerealiseerde abstracties" or abstractions made real.⁵⁸ This concept suggests that paintings frequently display forms derived from reality that are used to express an abstract idea or make an abstract idea concrete. The danger in this is that it draws too direct an analogy between emblems and paintings. While emblems certainly did influence paintings in certain instances, they must be conceived of as products of different traditions. Moreover, the concept of the abstraction

⁵⁶ For Peter Hecht see his essay in Peter Hecht, *De Hollandse Fijnschilders van Gerard Dou tot Adriaen van der Werff* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1989). As well as Peter Hecht, "The Debate on Symbol and Meaning in Dutch Seventeenth-Century Art: An Appeal to Common Sense," *Simiolus* 16 (1986). For Eric Jan Sluijter see Eric Jan Sluijter, "Belering en verhulling? Enkele 17de-eeuwse teksten over de schilderkunst en de iconologische benadering van Noordnederlandse schilderijen uit deze periode," *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 4 (1988). As well as his response to Peter Hecht: Eric Jan Sluijter, "Over fijnschilders en 'betekenis'; naar aanleiding van Peter Hecht, *De Hollandse Fijnschilders*," *Oud Holland* 105 (1991). For Svetlana Alpers see her controversial book Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁵⁷ Particularly important for the recognition of this selectivity and its potential meaning is Goedde, *Tempest*.

⁵⁸ Jongh, "Realism." 21.

made real rests on the root assumption that the meaning of the image is not in the visible but in the moralizing concept.

Additionally troubling in de Jongh is his assumption that a painting has one essential meaning. He admits that certain images do not lend themselves easily to interpretation, and he notes that form and technique are also signifiers, but as they cannot be interpreted iconographically he seems unwilling to consider them.⁵⁹ His search for a single meaning, moreover, seems to blind him to the truly multivalent quality of certain images. For instance, he discusses a sumptuous still life by Abraham van Beyeren and notes that because of the presence of a pocket watch the image is cautioning the viewer to moderation.⁶⁰ While this may be one strand of meaning within the work, de Jongh effectively ignores the rest of the painting and does not consider the other objects depicted. Moreover, he doesn't even consider the relative size and location of the watch, or van Beyeren's characteristic loose style. What de Jongh misses by exclusively employing the iconographic method is the ambiguous nature of the images. He frequently acknowledges ambiguity, but does not address it, or instead suggests that the multivalent nature of the images lies in the fact that they appear at once realistic and yet also possess symbolic content. The equivocal quality of the images goes beyond seeming realism, however, and expands to incorporate a vast body of potentially meaningful elements within each painting.

⁵⁹ Jongh, "Realism." 55-56.

⁶⁰ Jongh, "Realism." 30.

Anne Lowenthal more adequately addresses this broad potential for significance in her discussion of Willem Kalf's "Still Life with a Nautilus Cup" in Madrid.⁶¹ Within this suggestive essay she approaches the painting thoughtfully, considering each potential element, looking carefully at symbolic content, compositional evidence, and stylistic effects. It is within a larger approach like Lowenthal's that de Jongh's method truly becomes valuable. Only when we consider de Jongh's iconographic evidence in light of all of the other elements in a painting, always aware of the multiple, sometimes contradictory implications, can we arrive at a more balanced and informed understanding of a given work.

A more recent trend in the interpretation of still life is evident in the work of Julie Berger Hochstrasser. This approach can be understood as an examination of the objects depicted in still lifes with an eye to their status as real commodities in the material culture of seventeenth-century Dutch society. For instance, Hochstrasser examines the contents of paintings by several artists, including Pieter Claesz., Jan Davidsz. de Heem and Willem Claesz. Heda, discussing the origins and relative values (dietary and otherwise) of elements like herring and cheese.⁶² She draws from a variety of contemporary sources, including treatises on proper diet, manuals on the appropriate carving and presentation of food, as well as histories of the Netherlands and the poems of Jacob Cats. Furnished with this historical information, Hochstrasser is then able to draw conclusions about what kinds of associations a contemporary viewer might have brought to a still life painting

⁶¹ Anne W. Lowenthal, "Contemplating Kalf," in *The Object as Subject: Studies in the Interpretation of Still Life*, ed. Anne W. Lowenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁶² Hochstrasser, "Feasting," 73-78

full of familiar objects. The conclusions her method yields are provocative and encouraging and broaden the scope of interpretation in a useful way.

In her article “Imag(in)ing Prosperity: Painting and Material Culture in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Household,”⁶³ Hochstrasser examines the ways in which still lifes and the objects depicted in them relate to the actual contents of Dutch homes as recorded in inventories. She suggests, moreover, that still lifes (and paintings in general) were important elements in the creation of a sense of domesticity in the seventeenth century. Her approach here is broad, and adopts a standpoint that is well informed by material culture studies and less influenced by iconographic interpretation than her article on the monochrome *bancketje*. Both of Hochstrasser’s articles are suggestive meditations on still life paintings and the objects they depict. They go far in broadening not only the potential source material but also the aspects of paintings that should be taken into account in undertaking interpretation. Hochstrasser’s work has been especially important for redirecting the study of still life painting. Understanding the social and material value of the objects artists chose to depict is crucial to comprehending their motivations in crafting their paintings.

The analysis of cultural context also relates to the theoretical work of Norman Bryson on still life.⁶⁴ Particularly relevant to this study is his chapter on abundance in his

⁶³ Julie Berger Hochstrasser, “Imag(in)ing Prosperity: Painting and Material Culture in the 17th Century Dutch Household,” *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 51 (2000).

⁶⁴ Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

1990 book on still life painting.⁶⁵ Bryson begins with encouraging assertions about the importance of adopting a broad, more encompassing interpretive approach to still life painting.⁶⁶ Moreover, he makes insightful observations on flower still life painting, and their demonstration of both horticultural and artistic skill. He notes that these flower pieces speak ultimately to the power of human beings over nature. Nevertheless, Bryson problematically bases his social analysis almost exclusively on the vivid but overstated book by Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*.⁶⁷ This leads Bryson away from his earlier perceptive comments to suggestions that the still lifes of Pieter Claesz communicate an anxiety about wealth and an admonition against excess made particularly apparent because of his use of the monochrome style.⁶⁸ It is forced conclusions such as these as well as an underlying reliance on flawed historical interpretations that make Bryson's text a problematic one.⁶⁹

Larry Goedde's writing on still life painting is fundamental to contemporary approaches to Dutch still life. His essay on still life and *ekphrasis* has been essential for the field in terms of expanding the potential import of still life paintings by suggesting that they can be viewed as microcosms of the larger world, just as a human being too is a

⁶⁵ Bryson, *Looking*. Chapter 3, 96-135

⁶⁶ Bryson, *Looking*. 120.

⁶⁷ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

⁶⁸ Bryson, *Looking*. 113-115

⁶⁹ Similarly frustrating is the writing of Hal Foster on Dutch still life. Hal Foster, "The Art of Fetishism: Notes on Dutch Still Life," in *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, ed. Emily Apter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) Foster's utterly anachronistic application of Freudian discourse to Dutch still lifes and his lack of understanding of their social and cultural background makes his text marginal at best.

microcosm of the world.⁷⁰ This realization allows an increased scope of reference and greatly expands the possible implications of still life paintings. Moreover the essay expressed the possibility of looking to literary sources beyond emblems, in this case the *ekphrastic* poetry of Joachim Oudaan, as a means of finding significance in still life paintings.⁷¹ These *ekphrastic* poems are direct reactions to paintings and can therefore be more fruitfully examined for potential significance than emblem literature, which is independent in nature. In addition Goedde expresses a heightened awareness of the conventional nature of still life paintings and their capacity to evoke empathic responses from viewers that endows them with greater interpretive potential.⁷²

Celeste Brusati's numerous articles on still life, as well as her book on Samuel van Hoogstraten have also been crucial to the understanding of still life painting.⁷³ Brusati's work, like Goedde's, has an eye for the contrived nature of still life. In accordance with this awareness, she has written on important motifs found in still life, such as the reflected self-portrait. In addition, she has contributed thoughtful studies on *trompe l'oeil* elements in still life painting, carefully parsing the manner in which such works toy with notions of artifice and viewer awareness. Moreover, Brusati has written extensively on artistic self-consciousness, particularly in the work of Samuel van

⁷⁰ Goedde, "Little World." 36-8

⁷¹ Goedde, "Little World." 36

⁷² For conventionality also see Goedde, *Tempest*.

⁷³ The articles that have been particularly useful are Brusati, "Stilled."; Celeste Brusati, "Capitalizing on the Counterfeit: Trompe L'Oeil Negotiations," in *Still-Life Paintings in the Netherlands 1550-1720*, ed. Alan Chong and Wouter Kloek (Zwolle: Waanders, 1999).; Her book on Hoogstraten has also been a crucial source for my work: Celeste Brusati, *Artifice and Illusion: The Art and Writing of Samuel van Hoogstraten* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995).

Hoogstraten. Confronting similar themes is the singular work of Victor Stoichita.⁷⁴ In his writing, Stoichita teases out some of the most paradoxical qualities of still life paintings. He is particularly astute at parsing the way that still life, because of its origins and its tendency towards illusionism, is predisposed to an emphasis on technique and a demonstrable awareness of the viewer.

The vast literature on collecting and the art market has also played a great part in the field of still life painting. As Julie Berger Hochstrasser's work suggests, still life paintings are at heart depictions of objects, frequently objects that were sought after and collected in the seventeenth-century. Understanding attitudes towards collecting helps shed light on how seventeenth-century viewers and collectors might have viewed these paintings. Moreover, market and inventory studies have led to important realizations about the popularity of the genre of still life throughout the course of the seventeenth-century. In addition, examination of the locations in which still lifes were found in seventeenth-century inventories has yielded insights into their relative significance and potential import in the minds and culture of Dutch consumers.⁷⁵

The work of John Michael Montias has proven fundamental to understanding issues ranging from the prices of paintings to the complex relationships between

⁷⁴ Victor I. Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Modern Meta-Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). On still life in particular see chapter 2, pages 17-29.

⁷⁵ For the popularity of still life see John Michael Montias, "Works of Art in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam: An Analysis of Subjects and Attributions," in *Art in History History in Art: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Culture*, ed. David Freedberg and Jan de Vries (Santa Monica: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1987). For the locations of still lifes in Dutch homes see John Loughman and John Michael Montias, *Public and Private Spaces: Works of Art in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Houses* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000).

paintings and other objects in the homes of seventeenth-century collectors.⁷⁶ Montias was one of the original researchers on the intersection between economics and the arts, what has now become a rich and varied field of study. Related to Montias's work is Marten Jan Bok's 1994 dissertation that examines the art market itself, and the complex relationship between the economic success of the Netherlands and the increased production of paintings.⁷⁷

The work of Neil de Marchi and Hans van Miegroet has also been central to understanding of some of the more complex issues surrounding the market and collecting. Their 1994 article in the *Art Bulletin* is a lucid discussion of how paintings were assessed, and the way that the suppliers of the market functioned.⁷⁸ Their work on the Antwerp-Paris art trade, particularly the role of Jean-Michel Picart has been crucial to gaining insight on how dealers determined what kind of art to supply to a particular

⁷⁶John Michael Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft: A Socio-Economic Study of the Seventeenth-Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982).; John Michael Montias, *Vermeer and His Milieu: A Web of Social History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).; For an understanding of the relative importance of different genres of painting see Montias, "Works of Art."; This subject is reprised in John Michael Montias, "Works of Art in a Random Sample of Amsterdam Inventories," in *Economic History and the Arts*, ed. Michael North (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1996).; For the role the consumer played see John Michael Montias, "The Sovereign Consumer: the Adaptation of Art to Demand in the Netherlands in the Early Modern Period," in *Artists - Dealers - Consumers: On the Social World of Art*, ed. Ton Bevers (Hilversum: Verloren).; For the role of dealers see John Michael Montias, "Art Dealers in the Seventeenth-Century Netherlands," *Simiolus* 18, no. 4 (1988).; An excellent broad survey of the early evolution and later development of economic literature on art see John Michael Montias, "Socio-Economic Aspects of Netherlandish Art from the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Century: A Survey," *The Art Bulletin* LXXII, no. 3 (1990).; This work with John Loughman attempts to comprehend the manner in which paintings functioned in private homes: Loughman and Montias, *Public*.; For a further analysis of how paintings competed with other objects in the home see John Michael Montias, "Works of Art Competing with Other Goods in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Inventories," in *Mapping Markets for Painting in Europe 1450-1750*, ed. Neil de Marchi and Hans J. van Miegroet (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2006).

⁷⁷ Marten Jan Bok, "Vraag en aanbod op de Nederlandse Kunstmarkt, 1580-1700" (Universiteit van Utrecht, 1994).

⁷⁸ Neil de Marchi and Hans J. van Miegroet, "Art, Value, and Market Practices in the Netherlands in the Seventeenth Century," *The Art Bulletin* 76, no. 3 (1994).

market.⁷⁹ De Marchi and van Miegroet's essay on originals and copies shows the potential application of some of their findings.⁸⁰ Their thinking on the importance of artistic invention to the value, whether real or perceived, of a work of art is a fundamental insight on how markets functioned. Through their data they were able to suggest that artistic invention was a measurable commodity that the market rewarded with higher prices. Finally, their 2006 collection of essays, *Mapping Markets for Paintings in Europe 1450-1750* is arguably one of the most significant collections of essays on the art market to be published in recent years.⁸¹

Understanding the culture of collecting and the thirst for paintings and other collectible objects like silver is important for the genre of still life painting. Modern scholarship on encyclopedic as well as microcosmic collections forms one strain of this discussion.⁸² Information on the collecting of Italian paintings in the Dutch Republic is

⁷⁹ Neil de Marchi and Hans J. van Miegroet, "Novelty and Fashion Circuits in the Mid-Seventeenth-Century Antwerp-Paris Art Trade," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28, no. 1 (1998).

⁸⁰ Neil de Marchi and Hans J. van Miegroet, "Pricing Invention: "Originals," "Copies," and Their Relative Value in Seventeenth Century Netherlandish Art Markets," in *Economics of the Arts: Selected Essays*, ed. Victor A. Ginsburgh, *Contributions to Economic Analysis* (Amsterdam, Lausanne, New York, Oxford, Shannon, Tokyo: Elsevier, 1996).

⁸¹ Neil de Marchi and Hans J. van Miegroet, eds., *Mapping Markets for Paintings in Europe 1450-1750* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).

⁸² The classic source on collecting is Arthur Macgregor Oliver Impey, ed., *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). A particularly useful essay in that anthology is Th. H. Lunsingh Scheurleer, "Early Dutch Cabinets of Curiosities," in *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).; The notion of the microcosmic collection can be found in Ellinoor Bergvelt and Renée Kistemaker, eds., *De Wereld binnen handbereik. Nederlandse kunst- en rariteitenverzamelingen, 1585-1735* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1992).; Equally useful in this regard is Ellinoor Bergvelt, Debora J. Meijers, and Mieke Rijnders, eds., *Verzamelen: van rariteitenkabinet tot kunstmuseum* (Houten: Gaade, 1993).; Joy Kenseth, ed., *The Age of the Marvelous* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991). More general sources include Arthur K. Wheelock, *A Collector's Cabinet* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1998).

yet another.⁸³ The display of these collections is an equally revealing subject.⁸⁴ Finally, the relation of all of these issues to still life painting is explored quite effectively by Julie Berger Hochstrasser.⁸⁵

Ultimately, this dissertation straddles two realms, that of the catalogue raisonné and that of the analytical study of still life painting. It is my hope that in studying the work of Willem van Aelst I have provided a view into the life of this remarkable artist. This close examination supports and offers up a range of analytical approaches to the study of still life painting. In particular it suggests how the careful study of technique, coupled with attention to composition, subject matter and the social environment in which the painting was created, can begin to suggest significance for a work of art and ultimately, a genre. In doing so I have tried to move past the desire for one single “meaning” that will unlock any particular painting. My goal is to suggest a more balanced and inclusive manner of examining paintings. Van Aelst’s rich artistry and colorful, if only partly known, personality makes this undertaking a continual, extraordinary process of discovery.

⁸³ Henk Th. van Veen, "Uitzonderlijke verzamelingen: Italiaanse kunst en klassieke sculptuur in Nederland," in *De wereld binnen handbereik: Nederlandse kunst- en rariteitenverzamelingen, 1585-1735*, ed. Ellinoor Bergvelt and Renée Kistemaker (Zwolle: Waanders, 1992).; Jonathan Bikker, "The Deutz Brothers, Italian Paintings and Michiel Sweerts: New Information from Elisabeth Coyman's 'Journael'," *Simiolus* 26, no. 4 (1998).; On the Reynst brothers see Anne-Marie S. Logan, *The 'Cabinet' of the Brothers Gerard and Jan Reynst* (Amsterdam, Oxford, New York: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1979).

⁸⁴ Eric Jan Sluijter, "'All Striving to Adorne their houses with costly peeces' Two Case Studies of Paintings in Wealthy Interiors," in *Art and Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt*, ed. Marlene Chambers and Mariët Westermann (Zwolle: Waanders, 2001).

⁸⁵ Hochstrasser, "Imag(in)ing."; Julie Berger Hochstrasser, *Still Life and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).; Also see Simon Schama, "Perishable Commodities: Dutch Still-Life Painting and the 'Empire of Things'," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

Chapter 2: Biography

Dirck van Bleyswijck and Arnold Houbraken: The Earliest Biographers

In *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, published in 1667, Dirk van Bleyswijck provides the earliest known biography of Willem van Aelst.¹ As van Aelst was still living at the time of publication, the complete story of his life is not reported until 1718-21 when Arnold Houbraken includes his biography in his *Groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*.² In 1729 Reinier Boitet republishes a greatly updated version of Bleyswijck's *Beschryvinge der stad Delft*, which reformulates the biography that Houbraken wrote a few years earlier, removing some of Houbraken's more acerbic comments.³ As the two biographies by Bleyswijck and Houbraken are the foundation for all subsequent accounts of van Aelst's life it behooves us to examine both of them here. Boitet's amended version of Houbraken's biography of van Aelst will also be considered, however mainly in light of what it reveals about Houbraken's prejudices.

Dirk van Bleyswijck's 1667 life of van Aelst is the earliest of the three versions and begins, as all of the versions do, with the life of van Aelst's uncle and teacher, Evert van Aelst⁴:

¹ Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge*. I, 855-856

² Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Volume 1, 228-230.

³ Reinier Boitet, *Beschryving der stad Delft*, reprinted in 1972 by Uitgeversmaatschappij Repro-Holland, Alphen a/d Rijn and N.V. Buijten & Schipperheijn, Amsterdam ed. (Delft: 1729). 785-786

⁴ Bleyswijck, *Beschryvinge*. I, 855-856. *The Dutch text reads as follows: Evert van Aelst Willemsz. geboren 1602. is geweest een seer uytnemend Schilder in allerhande soort van stil-staende leben/ in sonderheyt fruyt/ hetselbe seer natuurlijk uytbeeldende/ als mede ysere harnassen/ Storm-hoeden en andere omstandigheden seer eygentlijk haren glans en weer-schijn doende hebben/ en in alles een goede houding en welstandt gebruyckende/ is alhier geboren Anno 1602. en overleden 1658. Naerlatende sijn Neef Willem van Aelst, soon van sijn Broeder Jan van Aelst, gewesene Notaris alhier/ die dese konst van sijn Oom soo*

Evert van Aelst Willemsz., born in 1602 was a very outstanding painter in all sorts of still-standing life, in particular fruit which he depicted very naturally, also he could very accurately capture the luster and reflection of iron armor, helmets and other elaborate things. And in everything he used good composition and appearance. He was born in 1602 and died in 1658. He left behind his nephew Willem van Aelst, son of his brother, Jan van Aelst, a notaris in this city. Willem learned art so well from his uncle that even in his youth he surpassed him and has currently advanced so deep in his study of art that his work is no longer a painting but appears to truly be life itself. In his youth he spent four years in France and seven years in Italy, where he was held in great esteem by Cardinals, Princes and Lords. Finally in the year 1656 he returned to his fatherland. There, he proceeded to live in Amsterdam, where his art was greatly esteemed by all Gentlemen experts and connoisseurs, and was desired and sought after for very high prices both without and within the country. For this reason our frequently mentioned Fleming Cornelis de Bie put these rhymes in his Gulden Cabinet.

That which Nature can press from her bosom
 (Called by our Artists still-standing things)
 Wherein a life hides that has no feeling
 A life without spirit, yet alive in its life:
 As it can be seen with open eyes in the fruits of the earth
 So it can be represented by a painter's hand with its brush
 Whether silver or fine gold, whether iron or steel
 And any other material, composed of metal.
 In which Art shows itself, wrought by human hands
 That made van Aelst known, in far lying lands
 Through the art from his brush, which fully discovered life
 That is both without life and tugs at life.

wel geleerd heeft dat hy noch al jongh sijnde hem te boven ging/ en tegen woordig soo diep in die studie is geavanceert/ dat sijn werck langer geen Schildery maer waerlijck het leben self schijnt te zijn. Hy heeft in sijn Jeugt vier Jaren in Vranckrijck en seben in Italie besteet/ alwaer hy by Cardinalen/ Vorsten/ en veel groote Heeren in hoogachtinge is geweest/ eyndelijck in den Jaere 1656. weder in sijn Vaderlandt gekeert zijnde/ heeft hem met ter woon tot Amsterdam begeben/ alwaer sijn konst by alle Heeren kendens en Liefhebbers grotelijck ge-eert/ en tot seer hoogen prijs/ soo buyten als binnen 's Lands begeert en getrocken werd: Des- wegen onsen meer-gemelten Vlaming Cornelis de Bie, in sijn gulden Cabinet dese rijmen steld. Al 't gen' Natura can uyt haeren boesem dringen/ (By onse Constenaers genoemt stil-staende dingen)/ Waer in een leven schuylt dat geen gevoelen heeft/Een leven sonder ziel, doch in sijn selven leeft:/Als in d'aerds vruchten is te sien met open oogen /Dat kan een Schilders handt met haer Pinceel vertoogen./Ist silver oft fijn gout, ist yser ofte stael /En eenich ander stof, van op gemaect metael./Daer sich de Const in thoont, gewrocht van menschen handen /Dat maekt Van Aelst bekend, in veer gelegen Landen /Door Const van sijn Pinceel, die 't leven gans ontdeckt /Die sonder leven is en op het leven treckt

Over fifty years later, in his *Groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* Arnold Houbraken provides the first full account of Willem van Aelst's life, full of additional commentary and opinion:

Evert van Aelst was born in Delft in the year 1602. He was an honest painter in all sorts of still-standing life, especially fruit, which he knew how to depict very naturally, as well as all kinds of armor, plants (monkshood, wolfsbane), and all sorts of shining metal which he knew how to give the appropriate gleam and luster. He died in 1658 and was succeeded by his artistic follower, Willem van Aelst, son of his brother, Jan van Aelst, a Delft notary. Willem had learned Art from his uncle so well, that although he was still young he had already surpassed him and shown so much growth in Art, and knew how to imitate life so naturally, that the work of his brush seemed to be no painting but life itself. In his youth he practiced art for four years in France and seven years in Italy, and during this time he was held in esteem by Cardinals, Princes and lords. In the year 1656, having returned to his fatherland, he settled first in Delft and then proceeded to Amsterdam, where his art was already held in high regard by all connoisseurs and was sold for high prices. From which one clearly sees, and can draw a general conclusion, how all arts and branches of learning are not discovered in their perfection from the first moment; but that the discoverer or others moving forward gradually on that ground, have discovered and invented that which was lacking to bring them to their highest perfection. Willem, also known as Guilhelmo, was a man (after he had been in Italy) who had a grand disposition, and who no one, especially if he had drunk beyond his limit, contradicted. It so happened that Burgomaster Maarzeveen got into a dispute with him, over one thing or another, for which they came to words.

Van Aelst, who didn't want to back down (lower his sails) before a Burgomaster of Amsterdam, in a matter in which he thought himself in the right, shot up, pulled open his upper jacket, and showed the golden medal and chain on his breast, which he had received from the Grand Duke of Tuscany, saying: *You were born with a moneybag around your neck, and that is all; but what I am, I am through merit.* But that this episode came back to afflict him, not even he, who told it to me, doubted.

A man (as Gratian said) forsakes his esteem through an obstinate defense; because such a thing does not speak for truthfulness, rather it displays his stubbornness. And in another place. Some trust themselves so much on their merits that they take no care at all to make themselves loved.

Although he (as I have just said) had a grand disposition, the son of Venus nevertheless hit him with his flaming arrow, so much so that he threw himself away on his maidservant, who was a fat krauthead, married the same and produced three handsome children with her. During this time he lived on the Prinsengracht, near the Walloon Orphanage, where he also died in the year 1679: But the year of his birth I was not able to find out, and therefore I have linked the work of his life to that of his artistic contemporaries.

Jan Vos wrote the following verse on one of his distinguished flower paintings:

*Here sweet Spring appears in wintertime.
Nature, who stupefies with her brush all who paint,
Goes into a decline out of vexation now that she sees this
Aurora, set aside your covering of roses from your head.
Here roses grow that surpass your coiffure.
So Van Aelst through art becomes renowned the world over.
One ought to extol him who has overcome others.
His hand, full of wit, painted the petals of these flowers
With a splendor that will never wither.
The foliage that endures heat and cold will last forever.
Lady Venus will exchange her garland for this growth;
In order to show off the leaves when she makes merry;
Or when she charmingly contests the heart of Mars.
The roster of paintings is the adornment of ladies.*

After his death, his widow departed with the children (this was in the year 1680) to her homeland, where a brewer, tempted by the solid rijksdaalders that she brought with her, married her. But it was not long before a wretched misfortune befell the oldest of the children, who was a well-made youth, but who fell in the brewer's kettle and was burned up.⁵

⁵ Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Volume 1, 228-230. I have included this English translation of Houbraken's biography as an aid for the reader. The translation, with assistance from Larry Goedde, is my own. The phrase in the title of the dissertation *beschilddert met en glans* is drawn from the Jan Vos poem that Houbraken includes in his biography. It translates to: painted with splendor. The Dutch text of Houbraken reads as follows: *Evert van Aelst, is geboren te Delf in 't jaar 1602. Hy was een braaf schilder in allerhande sort van stilstaande leven, inzonderheid Fruit, dat hij heel natuurlyk wist te verbeelden, als mede yzere Harnassen, Stormhoeden, en alle sort van glansige Metalen, die hy hunnen behoorlyken glans een weerschyn naar vereisch wist te geven. Hy stierf 1658. naarlatende tot naarvolger in de Konst Willem van Aelst, Zoon van zyn broeder Jan van Aelst, Notaris te Delf, die deze Konst van zynen Oom zo wel geleerd heeft, dat hy nog jong zynde, hem te boven ging, ja zodanig in de Konst toenam, en het leven zo natuurlyk wist n ate bootsen, dat zyn penceelwerk geen schildery, maar het leven zelf scheen te wezen. Hy heeft in zyn jeugt vier jaren in Vrankryk en seven jaren in Italiën de Konst geoeffent, en in dien tyd by Kardinalen, Vorsten en groote Heeren in aanzien geweest. In den jare 1656 weden in zyn Vaderland gekeerd, heeft hy zig met 'er woon eerst te Delf, daar na tot Amsterdam begeven, alwaar zyne Konst by alle konstkenneren hoog gegagt is geworden, en tot een hoogen prys verkogt. Waar uit men klaarlyk ziet, en daar*

Both of these biographies are revealing documents with which to begin a study of van Aelst as they tell us much beyond simple facts and dates. A simple comparison of them reveals much about the prejudices and opinions of Houbraken.⁶ The description of the life of Evert van Aelst is a virtually identical preface to both biographies and is limited to a few lines praising his work and referring to him as an “honest” painter. The grouping of the lives of Evert and Willem van Aelst is not only logical, it allows the first to act as a

uit besluit kan maken in 't algemeen hoe alle konsten en wetenschappen niet van eersten af aan in hare volkomenheid zyn uitgevonden; maar dat de vinder, of anderen op dien grond voortvarende trapswijze hebben ontdekt, en uitgevonden, 't geen daar aan onbrak, om ze te brengen tot hare hoogste volkomenheid. Willem, anders Guilhelmo, was een man (na dat hy in Italiën geweest had) die een grootmoedigen inborst bezat, en die niemant, inzonderheid als hy wat boven zyn peil gedronken had, ontzag. 'T is gebeurt, dat de Borgermeester Maarseveen met hem geschil kreeg, over d'eene of andere zaak, waar door zy in woorden kwamen. Van Aelst, die voor een Borgermeester van Amsterdam niet wilde zyn zeil stryken, en in een zaak daar hy meendereg in te hebben, stoof op, trok zyn boven rok open, en toonde op zyn borst den gouden penning, en keten die hy van den Groothertog van Toskanen had gekregen, zeggende: Gy zyt met een geldzak om uw hals geboren, en dat is t al; maar dat ik ben, ben ik doorverdienste. Maar of hem die worst (als he spreekwoord zeit) naderhand niet opbrak, daar twyffelde zelf, die 't my verhaald heeft, niet aan. Een man (zeit Gratiaan) verliest zyn agting door een hardnekkige verdediging; want zulks is niet de waarheid voorspreken, maar eer zyn koppigheid vertoonen. En op een andere plaats. Zommige vertrouwen zig zoo zeer op hunne verdiensten, datze gansch geen zorg dragen, om zig te doen beminnen. Schoon hy (gelyk ik even gezegt heb) een grootmoedigen inborst bezat, nogtans trof hem Venus zoon met zyn vlamme schicht, zoodanig dat hy verslingerde ann zyn dienstmeit, date en dikke moffekop was, de zelve trouwde, en drie schooner kinderen by haar teelde. In dien tyd woonde hy op de Princegrast, by het Waale Weeshuis daar hy ook gestorven is, in 't jaar 1679: Maar het jaar zynere geboorte heb ik niet konnen te weten komen, en heb daarom zyn levensbedryf aan dat van zyne tyd- en konstgenooten geschakelt. Jan Vos maakte op een zynere voornaamste bloemtafereelen dit volgende vaersje: Hier komt de lieve Lent by wintertyd verschynen. Natuur, die al wie maalt door haar penceel verdooft, Begint, nu zy dit ziet, van enk'len spyt te kwynen. Aurora, leg uw pruik vol roozen van uw hooft: Hier groeijen roozen die uw hulsel overtreffen. Zoo word van Aelst, door Konst, de waereld door beroemt. Wie and'ren overwint behoort niet te verhessen. Zyn hand, vol geesten, heeft het blad van dit gebloemt Beschildert met een glans, die nimmer zal verslensen. Het loof dat heet en koud verduurt zal eeuwig staan. Vrouw Venus zou haar krans om dit gewasch verwensen; Om, als zy hoogtyd houd, te pronken met de blaân; Of als zy 't hart van Mars aanminnig komt bestryen. 'T cieraad van der Vrouwen is de lyst der Schilderyen./ Zyne Weduwe vertrok na zyn dood met de kenderen (dit was in 't jaar 1680) naar haar land, waar een Brouwer verlokt op de harde Ryksdaalders die zy mee gebragt had, haar trouwde. Maar 't leed niet lang of een droevig ongeluk trof den oudsten van de kinderen, zynde een welgemaakte jongen, want hy viel in den Brouwketel en verbrande.

⁶Hendrik J. Horn, *The Golden Age Revisited: Arnold Houbraken's Great Theatre of Netherlandish Painters and Paintresses* (Doornspijk: Davaco, 2000). In this book, Horn speaks at length about Houbraken's prejudices.

foil for the second. The story of Willem begins with mention of his father, Jan, a Delft notary, and gives a complimentary account of the talents and early life of Willem. Once again, this varies little in both texts. This history continues through the period he spent abroad, noting how he mingled with “Cardinals, Princes and Lords” while he was away. Both texts note that van Aelst returned in the year 1656. Upon his return, Willem settles in Amsterdam where his work was not only highly regarded by all lovers of art, but where it also fetched high prices. Only Bleyswijk’s text notes that van Aelst’s work was highly valued both in the United Provinces as well as beyond its borders. It is at this point that Houbraken picks up the remainder of the biography where Bleyswijk’s text left it. Bleyswijk concludes his biography with the poem on van Aelst that Cornelis de Bie included in his *Gulden Cabinet* in 1660.⁷

At this point in the biography, Houbraken begins to write abstractly on how all branches of art and learning are meant to be learned gradually and diligently, each generation building upon the successes of the prior. Only if all of these elements are in place can art achieve its highest perfection, according to Houbraken. This text, in fact, prepares the reader for the pointed anecdote that follows. Houbraken tells the amusing tale of Willem’s prideful encounter with Burgomaster Marzeveen of Amsterdam that ends with Willem dramatically showing off the gold medal he had received from the

⁷ Cornelis de Bie, *Het Gulden Cabinet van de Edel Vry Schilderconst*, Republished Soest: Davaco Publishers, 1971. ed. (Antwerp: Jan Meysens, 1660). The poem on van Aelst is on 291. In de Bie’s original publication, the poem is written to “Peeter van Aelst, Schilder van Hollandt”. It is clear that Willem van Aelst is intended, however, not only because there were no still life painters named Peeter van Aelst, but also because Bleyswijk recognizes and publishes the same poem at the end of his life of Willem van Aelst. The poem will be discussed in chapter five.

Duke of Tuscany and asserting that his achievements were made through merit, not entitlement.⁸ It was a remark, Houbraken leads us to believe, that would return to haunt Willem. Two quotations from Gratian⁹ conclude this section, the latter forebodingly states: "Some trust themselves so much on their merits that they take no care at all to make themselves loved."¹⁰

The rest of the biography tells the story of Willem's marriage to his housekeeper whom Houbraken scornfully calls a "dike moffekop" or "fat krauthead". He tells of the three children that they had together and that Willem died in 1679 in his home on the Prinsengracht near the Walloon orphanage.¹¹ Remarkably, after Willem's death Houbraken continues to follow the life of his widow and their three children, noting in a grisly conclusion to the biography that the eldest boy, a well made youth, fell into a brewer's kettle and was burned alive.¹²

Examination of Houbraken's biography reveals that this text goes beyond a simple account of the artist's life, and that it is, indeed, a document fraught with contradiction. Houbraken vacillates between praise of Willem's work and disparaging

⁸ If the incident occurred, the burgomaster that van Aelst likely confronted was Joan Huydecoper van Maarseveen the younger, who was elected burgomaster of Amsterdam thirteen times over. Further information on the Huydecoper family can be found in a number of different sources, perhaps the most succinct being Gary Schwartz, "Jan van der Heyden and the Huydecopers of Maarseveen," *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal* 11 (1983). Also useful are the entries in Johan E. Elias, *De Vroedschap van Amsterdam 1578-1795*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: N. Israel, 1963). Vol I: 384-391.

⁹ Gratiaan's *Oráculo* was first published in 1649 and was translated into Dutch in 1696. This information was found in Peter Hecht's revealing article: Peter Hecht, "Browsing in Houbraken: Developing a Fancy for an Underestimated Author," *Simiolus* 24, no. 2/3 (1996). 164. The quotations that Houbraken provides can be found in Baltazar Gracian, *The art of prudence: or a companion for a man of sense written originally in Spanish by Balthazar Gracian; now made English and illustrated with the Sieur Amelot de la Houssaie's notes by Mr Savage*. London, 1702. 112-113.

¹⁰ Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol. 1, 229.

¹¹ Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol. 1, 229.

¹² Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol. 1, 230.

comments about his character and his poor choice of a wife.¹³ He uses Willem as a moral exemplum, exposing his shortcomings and casting him as a figure who, for all his technical talents, should not be emulated as he does not represent the model or ideal artist.¹⁴ Houbraken does not criticize Willem's skill, in fact he praises it; rather it is his personal choices and his excessive pride that he finds fault with. Willem here is meant to be a type. His rise to mastery was too swift, and his prideful attitude and lack of acknowledgement of the contributions of his uncle and others who came before him, in Houbraken's mind, is ill advised. He does not diligently and carefully perfect himself at each level, building on the skill of his forebears. Indeed, he is unable to master the careful negotiations between social classes so crucial to his occupation. He demonstrates that he does not know his social place both by insulting a Burgomaster of Amsterdam and by marrying his housemaid. These are the characteristics that Houbraken faults him for, and it seems that they are the cause of the venom that is directed towards van Aelst.

Significantly, the change in the tenor of the biography occurs with the mention of Willem's travels to and success in France and Italy. Indeed, according to both Bleyswijck and Houbraken, Willem's reputation preceded him home, for when he returned and took up residence in Amsterdam his work sold for high prices and was sought after by art

¹³ In Horn, *Golden*. Hendrik J. Horn offers insightful commentary on the text. He suggests that the root of the disparaging nature of Houbraken's comments on van Aelst stem partially from Houbraken's general dislike of still life painting. (p. 452). Although Horn makes a convincing argument, I would suggest that in Willem van Aelst's biography the motivation is more complex. In his version of Houbraken's biography of van Aelst, Reiner Boitet avoids all of the moralizing admonitions included by Houbraken. He parrots Houbraken's description of van Aelst's wife, calling her a "dikke moffin" but his text is largely devoid of the venom found in Houbraken. Boitet, *Beschryving*. 785-786.

¹⁴ Paul Barolsky's writings, in particular Paul Barolsky, *Why Mona Lisa Smiles and Other Tales by Vasari* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991). are central to more sophisticated and likewise playful readings of artistic biographies and for the inspiration for my discussion.

lovers. Regardless, therefore, of the ultimate agenda that Houbraken brings to Willem's biography, this close reading reveals some things that are fundamental to understanding the character and identity of Willem van Aelst. Clearly his period of foreign travel was of crucial significance to his identity and self-awareness. The travel that he undertook in his youth was not only central to his artistic development, it was fundamental to the development of his artistic self-consciousness. Without his experience in France and Italy he would have most likely followed placidly in the footsteps of his Uncle Evert, living in Delft and painting relatively uninspired still lifes that would have formed a minor part of modern still life surveys. Instead, this period abroad awoke a latent self-awareness that allowed his art to develop into the dramatic and self-possessed oeuvre that we now know. Because of his travels he transformed himself from Willem van Aelst into Guilhelmo van Aelst and it is the study of this transformation and the motivations behind it that forms one of the central threads of this dissertation.

Further examination of Houbraken yields a striking poem by Jan Vos lauding one of his flower pieces. This poem reveals the extent to which van Aelst's work was revered by his contemporaries and will be the subject of discussion in chapter five. In addition Houbraken provides several other pieces of crucial biographical information. However, closer examination of this factual information, in conjunction with van Aelst's oeuvre,

and the documents and dated life events known to us, reveals the pressing need for a full biography of Willem van Aelst.¹⁵

I will divide the biography of van Aelst into four distinct periods corresponding to the significant changes in his life or circumstances. In each section I will also choose an exemplary painting, or in some cases paintings, that will help to give the reader a broad sense of how his style evolved as his circumstances changed. In addition, this consideration of paintings will help to ground the dissertation and place an emphasis on the documents I consider most crucial for understanding van Aelst as an artist: the paintings themselves.

Delft: Early Years and Training

Houbraken states correctly that van Aelst was born in the city of Delft. Indeed the archives of the city of Delft confirm that on May 16, 1627 Willem Jansz. van Aelst was baptized by his parents Jan van Aelst and Catharina (Trijntje Jans) de Veer.¹⁶ Willem was the youngest of three children, an older brother Jan baptized April 21, 1624 and another older brother also named Willem who was baptized on April 13, 1626 and who seems to

¹⁵ Much of the biographies of van Aelst that exist in modern scholarship rely broadly on the information that Houbraken provides. While Houbraken is not always inaccurate, there is much to be gleaned from reconstructing van Aelst's life as far as it is possible.

¹⁶ For this archival information on the van Aelst name in Delft I am indebted to Marten Jan Bok who generously shared his research and his findings with me. DTB Delft inv. 55, folio 41v. (DTB stands for Doopen, Trouw, Begravenis or Baptism, Marriage, Burial, and is the standard reference for these records. I will use it from this point forward)

have died shortly thereafter as he was buried on April 26, 1626.¹⁷ Houbraken and Bleyswijck describe Jan van Aelst as a notary, and although the archives in Delft do not list him as a notary, there is no reason to believe that this is incorrect. The suggestion is especially compelling because the profession of *procureur*, or solicitor is not infrequently found in the genealogy of the van Aelst name.¹⁸ The profession of notary would have meant that the van Aelst family would have been considered upper-middle class. The profession, although it did not require a university education, was a respected one because of the skills required, and would have meant that Willem van Aelst's parents would have been able to provide a comfortable life for their family.¹⁹

At the time of Willem's birth in 1627, Delft was a relatively prosperous city, as were many cities in the Netherlands at this point. The struggle for independence from Spain was a strain on the provinces, but despite the costs of war the economy flourished due to the profitable maritime trade network that had been established. Delft was, like many cities, in the midst of an economic upswing that was to end approximately mid-century. At this moment, however, the population was growing rapidly and there was a great deal of wealth being generated. As John Michael Montias, Marten Jan Bok and

¹⁷ The archival reference for Jan's baptism is: DTB Delft inv. 7, folio 89v. The archival references for the baptism and burial of the elder Willem van Aelst are (respectively): DTB Delft, Inv. 8, folio 23v; and DTB Delft inv. 37.

¹⁸ For this information I am once again grateful to Marten Jan Bok, who generously provided me a copy of his findings on the subject. Jan van Aelst's father, Willem van Aelst, is referred to several times in the Delft archives as *Procureur* (DTB Delft, inv. 123, DTB Delft inv. 39) The professions of notary and solicitor, while by no means identical, were undoubtedly related to one another. Indeed, a notary was a profession slightly below that of a solicitor, which required university training. Donna Merwick, *Death of a Notary: Conquest and Change in Colonial New York* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999). 189. A. Pitlo, *De Zeventiende en Achiende Eeuwsche Notarisboeken* (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon N. V., 1948). 7-8.

¹⁹ Merwick, *Death*. 189-90. Pitlo, *Notarisboeken*. 7-8.

others have convincingly argued, this prosperity, coupled with a rise in the awareness and importance of the identity of the artist, led to a culture of collecting.²⁰ This prosperity and vogue for collecting paintings probably explains why Willem van Aelst embarked on his chosen career. That his Uncle Evert van Aelst was a moderately successful still life painter probably provided some reassurance that this would be a profitable line of work.

Other than a few mentions in original sources we essentially know very little of Evert van Aelst, the only evidence that his paintings were valued is found in the large numbers of works by him that are found in contemporary inventories, including those of wealthy collectors.²¹ According to Houbraken, Evert was the teacher of his nephew Willem and of the well-known painter of church and domestic interiors, Emmanuel de Witte.²² There has been some suggestion that Evert was also the teacher of Jacob Deneys, however the dates and circumstances of his life do not support this.²³ Some examples of Evert's work have come up on the art market in the past, but they remain exceedingly rare objects.²⁴

²⁰ Montias, *Artists*. 227; Marten Jan Bok, "Art Lovers and Their Paintings: Van Mander's *Schilder-Boek* as a Source for the History of the Art Market in the Northern Netherlands," in *Dawn of the Golden Age: Northern Netherlandish Art 1580-1620* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1993-1994). 136; Marten Jan Bok, "Society, Culture and Collecting in Seventeenth Century Delft," in *Vermeer and the Delft School* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001). 206. A crucial article for the understanding of the intricacies of art markets is: Marchi and Miegroet, "Art."

²¹ Montias, *Artists*. 130-31.

²² For the mention of Emmanuel de Witte as Evert's student see Houbraken, vol. 1, 283. For the mention of Willem as his student see the biography of Willem, Houbraken, vol 1, 228.

²³ The source for this suggestion is Weyermann 3:62. Jacob Deneys, known as Jacob de Neys, was born in Antwerp in 1665, after the death of Evert van Aelst. He was said to have painted in the style of Evert van Aelst, however could never have been his pupil.

²⁴ Adriaan van der Willigen and Fred G. Meijer, *A Dictionary of Dutch and Flemish Still Life Painters Working in Oils 1525-1725* (Leiden: Primavera Press in Cooperation with the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD), 2003). 25. Notes that a flower piece was featured in a Dorotheum sale, 19 September, 1978, dated 1653. The image of this work was reproduced in *Weltkunst* 1978, 1752. Also referenced is a

Photographs of Evert's known works reveal a relatively spare, restrained style. Rather than elaborate compositions, his works are much more austere and controlled. In many ways they are related to works done in Middelburg. Indeed, it is not at all surprising to discover this influence, evident most notably in his flower paintings, in view of the fact that Balthasar van der Ast, one of Ambrosius Bosschaert's pupils, moved to Delft and became a citizen and a member of the Guild of St. Luke on February 26, 1633.²⁵ His home at 144-146 Oude Delft (from after 1640-1657) is suggestively close to 169 Oude Delft, where Willem van Aelst may have lived from 1656-57 when he first returned from Italy.²⁶ A comparison of a painting by Evert van Aelst to one by Balthasar van der Ast reveals the extent of the relationship of Evert's work to Middelburg school painting. (Figure 2 and Figure 3)

At their most basic levels, both still lifes have a balanced, symmetrical quality. Evert's is slightly more rounded than Balthasar's more vertical work, but both have a similar evenness in composition, and both show a marked attention to individual flowers, as if each were a portrait of a particular flower, even if these carefully depicted flowers are subordinated to the overall shape of the bouquet. In both works the vase in which the flowers are held is downplayed to a certain degree. Also both artists have chosen to use the device of small animals: snails, spiders, a cricket, to adorn their bouquet. In addition,

1639 fruit piece that was with Alfred or Thomas Brod in London in 1976; another fruit piece, dated 1641 with the Edel Gallery (London and Cologne) in 1986; another fruit piece, dated 1642, was in the collection of the Suermondt-Ludwig Museum in Aachen, but this work was lost in World War II.

²⁵ Montias, *Artists*. 340.

²⁶ Liedtke, *Vermeer*. 564. This assertion is by no means universally supported, and Fred Meijer in his biographical sketch of van Aelst flatly denies it. Meijer, *Ward*. 146.

the presence of shells scattered at the foot of the bouquet signifies an awareness of and a responsiveness to the culture of the collector and the kinds of objects that would have been commonplace in a wealthy collector's cabinet. On this basic level, it is clear that there is a degree of interaction between Evert van Aelst and Balthasar van der Ast, which suggests an ultimate link between the painters of Middelburg and the early work of Willem van Aelst.

On a more general level, Evert's paintings are characterized by planar compositions, and the quality of his brushwork appears surprisingly loose and rough when considered in relation to the mature style of his student and nephew Willem. The forms of his objects are also simplified. Fruits tend toward ovoid forms rather than individualized objects with clearly discernable characteristics. Though Willem, as we will see below, abandoned his uncle's spare style early on, he nevertheless always exercises a restraint and a balance that perhaps originated in his early training.

It is not precisely clear when Evert may have taken Willem as his pupil.²⁷ Since we know that Willem was inscribed into the guild of St. Luke on Nov. 9, 1643 (at approximately the age of sixteen) we can assume that van Aelst's training began at a very early age.²⁸ Indeed, according to Montias, the average age of entry into the guild for a

²⁷ The most concrete evidence that we have that Evert was a teacher at all, aside from the mentions in Houbraken's biographies, was discovered by J.M. Montias in the estate papers of Thomas Jansz. Pick, a rich Delft brewer. According to the entry in the 1638 papers, Pick paid Evert van Aelst seventy-two gulden for having taught painting to Adam Jansz. Pick, his grandson, who then went on to join the Guild of St. Luke in 1642. Montias, *Artists*. 167 and note 25. Orphan Chamber, *Boedel* no. 1324, cited in J.M. Montias, "New Documents on Vermeer and his Family," *Oud Holland*, 91 (1977): 287.

²⁸ Montias, *Artists*. 341.

sample of 47 Delft painters taken between 1613 and 1647, was 24.5 years old.²⁹ This underscores the early age at which Willem must have begun his training to have entered the guild at so young an age.

According to the dates that Houbraken gives, Willem must have left Delft to travel to France around 1645, since according to him he returned to Delft in 1656 after having spent four years in France and seven in Italy. Unfortunately, there is no real way to confirm whether the 1645 departure date is correct since, beyond the guild register that notes that he was inscribed into the guild in 1643, we have no further documents placing him in Delft before his departure for France. An examination of the known early works by van Aelst reveals a subtle change in not only the style of his paintings, but also the objects he includes in his paintings. Indeed, it appears that the year 1646 was a crucial point of transition for van Aelst, as works from this year feature characteristics both of his early Delft painting and of his later French works. This slight shift in style does not mean that 1646 was his date of departure since Willem could have very easily carried on with his Delft style while living in France, but it does suggest a new environment and new influences.

Perhaps what is more interesting to consider than when van Aelst left Delft is the question of why he left. Sadly, this is not a question to which it is possible to give any concrete answers. However, the sheer rarity of this journey for artists originating from Delft is a fact that colors this discussion. Of the 116 artist-painters who were masters of the Guild of St. Luke between 1613 and the end of the 1670's only fourteen made the

²⁹ Montias, *Artists*. 110.

journey south to complete their training.³⁰ That is less than nine percent of the total artists working during van Aelst's lifetime, and one of those fourteen artists was van Aelst himself. The fact that this journey was so seldom taken is a testament not only to the great expense it entailed, but to how unusual it was for a Delft artist like Willem to undertake such a trip.³¹ There must have been some awareness on the part of Willem's parents, or Evert van Aelst, or perhaps even Willem himself that his talent was such that a trip to France and Italy would be a worthwhile expense. Indeed, the fact that he embarked on this journey suggests that he came from a comfortable background. It is possible that the presence of Leonaert Bramer, who spent formative years in France and Italy and returned to Delft for a successful career, may have had some effect on Willem or those making decisions about his future. Indeed, between 1644 and 1645 Bramer served the first of three terms as headman of the Guild of St. Luke.³² It is possible that in this position he had some influence, whether direct or indirect, over the newly inscribed Willem van Aelst.

Also important to consider is why a still life painter would have wanted to make the journey south. Certainly the frequently cited words of Karel van Mander in *Den Grondt der edel vry schilder-const* would have been some encouragement to a young artist considering a journey south. "For Rome is the city before all other places that has much to offer the Painters who travel there, being the capital of the schools of

³⁰ Montias, *Artists*. 167.

³¹ Montias, *Artists*. 166

³² Liedtke, *Vermeer*. 228.

painting...³³ However, it cannot truly be said that Italy's greatest fame stemmed from its still life painters, although it is undeniable that Jacopo de Barberi and Caravaggio were significant figures in the history of still life painting, and the *studiolo* of Federico da Montefeltro holds a crucial place in the early development of still life as a genre. Perhaps the reason for van Aelst's journey is more closely connected with northern still life artists who had made the journey before him. The most significant figure in this regard is undeniably Jan Brueghel the Elder. Although he traveled from Antwerp to Italy some 50 years before Van Aelst, the fame of his work and his life would certainly have been known. Although Jan Brueghel's example may not have been the sole motivating factor behind van Aelst's journey, it is probable that Jan's professional success in Italy would have had a great appeal for a young still life artist with as "grand" a disposition as Willem van Aelst.

An early 1646 painting both exemplifies van Aelst's early work in Delft, and suggests the direction in which his style will develop. The painting is part of the Henry H. Weldon collection (Figure 4).³⁴ It is quite small (16.75 x 21.75 cm) and is painted on copper, a support that is not uncommonly found in his early works. Willem van Aelst was fastidious throughout his career about his signatures and this work bears one of the earliest manifestations of his signature: *W.V. Aelst A° 1646*. The painting itself is a fruit piece and an exceedingly simplified example of the genre, depicting only three peaches, a

³³ Van Mander 92, 66.

³⁴ *An Eye for Detail: Seventeenth Century Dutch and Flemish Paintings from the Collection of Henry H. Weldon*. 1999 The Walters Art Gallery. The entry for the painting can be found on pages 2-3. The collection was also previously exhibited in New Orleans: *In the Eye of the Beholder: Northern Baroque Paintings from the Collection of Henry H. Weldon*. New Orleans Museum of Art, 1997.

plum and a bunch of purple grapes. For those accustomed to seeing van Aelst's mastery of finish and complexity of composition, this work appears to be the work of a different artist.³⁵ The finish is fairly rough by his mature standards, but close examination reveals some familiar elements that suggest his later style. The peaches, although they do not seem to have the same fuzzy, halo-like surface effect of his later works, do already have relatively typical coloring and shape, albeit still somewhat immature. The plum is actually fairly like his mature renderings, with its typical bluish powdery blush on the surface of its skin. Indeed, the plum is one of the fruits he seems to master early in his career. The grapes are unfortunately the least successful of this composition. They begin to capture the same surface haze found on the plum, but not with great credibility. They also frequently bear a whitish dot, indicating a gleam or shine on their skin, a detail that gives them an unintended hardness and makes them read more effectively as marbles or small glass balls. A leaf, presumably stemming from the bunch of grapes, hovers uncertainly in the background over the leftmost peach. The use of leaves or branches to dramatically transform the shape of a composition is an effect which van Aelst uses to great advantage in his later works. In this instance we still observe him experimenting with the motif.

The composition of the painting is fairly evenly spread across the picture plane. It is clear, however, that van Aelst has made some attempt to suggest a diagonal running from the errant branch of grapes in the upper right, to the purple plum in the lower left.

³⁵ I have been unable to view this painting in person as I have attempted to do with the majority of the paintings I single out for discussion. Therefore I have relied on a good color reproduction. Faults in the description of the surface effect and qualities of the painting may be due to this fact.

This attempt to activate the composition through the insertion of a diagonal will become a hallmark of van Aelst's work and the presence of it in this early painting suggests that he was already actively thinking about the disposition and visual interest of his compositions. Unfortunately the plausibility of the grapes suffers further from this compositional manipulation as they appear to hover somewhat uncertainly in space. The peaches do not sit easily on the stone tabletop where they are arranged and appear instead to have been captured in mid-roll. Indeed, the peach that is furthest back in the composition looks as if it is about to roll off the backside of the surface. The fruits are arrayed on a simple stone surface which does not have any visible side edges, although we can easily detect the back edge of the stone. The tabletop is something that will later play a more active roll in his compositions as sides angle back in space and drapery hangs evocatively over the front edge. As seems to have been the convention, van Aelst also includes a chip and a crack in the front edge of the table, possibly to indicate the nature of the material or possibly to add visual interest.

This early 1646 work, then, betrays not only the youth of van Aelst (at the time of its execution he was only nineteen) but the strength and thoughtfulness of the artist beginning to emerge.

France: The First Stop on the Journey Abroad

Following his early entrance into the Delft Guild of St. Luke in 1643 at the age of sixteen, Willem embarked on his journey south. He departed in approximately 1645 or

1646, the precise date is difficult to know, and his first stop was France. Houbraken suggests that he was in France for four years, which would have placed him there until approximately 1649 or 1650. Based on evidence to be discussed below, I would suggest that he actually remained in France until 1651. This coordinates well with the paintings that are still in the collection of the Palazzo Pitti and the Uffizi in Florence, the earliest of which is dated 1652.

Regardless of the precise dates, the evidence that definitively places van Aelst in France for such an extended period is relatively tenuous. He very likely stopped for a time in France if he followed the route that most northern artists took when they embarked on a journey to Italy.³⁶ There were two main routes to Italy: the first went through Germany along the Rhine to Basel. From there artists could either travel via the Alps to Milan or through Austria via Innsbruck to Venice and the North of Italy.³⁷ This route via Germany was little used after 1618 because of the Thirty Years War. The second route was more frequently used, and was the one that van Aelst most likely took. It ran through France, although it avoided the Southern Netherlands for obvious reasons and instead approached France by sea, landing in Normandy and then proceeding on to Paris. Artists would then journey to Italy via Southern France, and the route here varied, eventually reaching Italy either through the mountains, along the coast or by sea.³⁸

³⁶ This information and the discussion to follow is based on Peter Schatborn, "The Journey to the South," in *Drawn to Warmth: 17th Century Dutch Artists in Italy* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2001). Here Schatborn provides a useful discussion of the physical journey south and the traditional routes taken.

³⁷ Schatborn, "Journey." 20.

³⁸ Schatborn, "Journey." 20-21. In her book on the Grand Tour, A. Frank-van Westrienen also discusses the different routes that travelers took on their journey southward from the Netherlands. A. Frank-van

Three dated paintings and the presence of his works in the inventory of Philippe de Champaigne provide further evidence that places van Aelst in France during the period 1645/6-1651. In addition, an examination of his work from this period reveals clear stylistic interaction with French painters such as Paul Liegois and Jean-Michel Picart. For instance, the private collection fruit piece by Paul Liegois (Figure 5) bears much in common with the 1649 fruitpiece by van Aelst in the Museum het Prinsenhof in Delft (Figure 6). It is clear that the two artists were looking at one another's work, for van Aelst adopted some of the compositional elements seen in Liegois such as the pronounced pyramidal shape and the use of leaves to extend the composition vertically. It is clear, though, that van Aelst maintains his own style, continuing in the technique that is carefully described, although considerably less hard edged than that of Liegois.

Jean Michel Picart too had some interaction with van Aelst. For instance, the large 1653 Picart flower piece in the Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe (Figure 7) reveals certain passages, particularly the treatment of the delicate daffodils at the center, that relate strongly to the 1651 flowerpiece by van Aelst that is in the Musée des Beaux Arts in Caen (Figure 8). In addition the strong diagonal composition present in Picart's work is something that also characterizes van Aelst's paintings. In this instance it is difficult to say whether this compositional development is the invention of either artist or of a general movement in the field of flower painting.

Although a number of the attributions made in the 1974 volume by Michel Faré on seventeenth-century French still life painting have been reevaluated since its publication, it is a seminal work and provides several important facts about van Aelst.³⁹ The first and most tantalizing of these is the fact that the inventory made of the collection of Philippe de Champaigne, Peintre du Roi, contained a still life painting by Willem van Aelst.⁴⁰ This is borne out by examination of the inventory, later published in 1892, and dating to 1674, which lists “un tableau de fruits de van Alst prisé quarante livres.”⁴¹ Relative to other works in the inventory this is not an exceptionally high price, a crucifixion being valued as high as 600 livres, but it is one of the few still life paintings in the inventory.⁴² The elevated status of Philippe de Champaigne in Parisian art circles, indeed within royal circles, cannot be overstated. From his early 1625 decoration at the Palais du Luxembourg almost until his death in 1674, Chamapigne remained a popular painter at the French court. Indeed, despite the death of Louis XIII and ascendance of Louis XIV, he persisted in his success and appeal as a court painter. The presence of a painting by van Aelst in his collection not only helps to confirm van Aelst’s presence in Paris, but it also suggests that he was successful during his time there. It may well be that van Aelst’s connection with the great painter is related to the Flemish origins of

³⁹ Michel Faré, *Le grand siècle de la nature morte en France: Le XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Société Française du Livre, 1974).

⁴⁰ Fare 1974, 50.

⁴¹ J.J. Guiffrey, "Les Peintres Philippe en Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne. Nouveaux documents et inventaires après décès (1659-1681)," *Nouvelles Archives de l'Art Français* (1892). 183, 197.

⁴² The crucifixion seems to have been painted by Philippe de Champaigne himself as it also appears in his nephew Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne’s inventory which was published in the same 1892 article. Interestingly, one of the other still lifes in the inventory is by the hand of Paul Liegois and is valued at half the worth of van Aelst’s: 20 livres. Guiffrey, "Peintres." 184.

Champaigne, but lacking any further information on the precise nature of their connection, this must remain speculative.

The connection that van Aelst had with Philippe de Champaigne, whatever its nature, is intimately related to a 1651 painting that provides both an example of van Aelst's work during this period and an important clue in the reconstruction of his biography (Figure 9).⁴³ The painting is a *pronk* still life featuring what appears to be a metal teapot on stand, a metal mounted tortoiseshell box spilling over with an assortment of jewelry, and a pocket watch. This work at first appears to be somewhat anomalous in the oeuvre of van Aelst as the subject matter differs markedly from his usual production. However, given the relatively early date of the painting, van Aelst would only have been twenty-four years old, making the deviation in subject matter easier to explain. Indeed, when placed next to one of the works he later went on to produce in Florence such as (Figure 10) the 1651 painting does not seem far out of character. Indeed, the reverse of the panel bears a panel mark identical to that found on the reverse of three paintings by van Aelst in French collections in Toulouse and Caen.⁴⁴ This panel mark, an intertwined M and reversed B, is the mark of the Antwerp panel maker Melchior de Bout, active in Antwerp 1625-1658.⁴⁵ The other element that aids in the confirmation of the attribution

⁴³ This image of this painting was found in the photo files at the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie in The Hague. In the files it is ascribed to van Aelst by Fred Meijer. My examination of the painting in the collection of the Zamek Vizovice in the Czech Republic causes me to confirm this attribution with great certainty.

⁴⁴ The two paintings in Toulouse are in the collection of the Musée des Augustins, Inv. RO 471 and Inv. RO 468. The painting in Caen is in the Musée des Beaux Arts, Inv. M. 78.1.1

⁴⁵ J. van Damme, "De Antwerpse tafereelmakers en hun merken. Identificatie en betekenis," *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (1990). 220-221. David Fiozzi, *Les tableaux hollandais des XXVIIe et XXVIIIe siècles du musée des Augustins catalogue raisonné* (Lavaur: Société de

is the presence of the pocket watch, here appearing for the first time in his paintings. The style in which it is painted and the position it occupies in the composition, as well the presence of the ribbon hanging in two loops off of the edge of the table, all suggest the hand of van Aelst. The object that occupies the center foreground of the composition, however, is a medal hanging on a chain, and it is this medal that makes the painting so fascinating. The medal is suspended on a chain that hangs improbably from the mouth of the tortoiseshell box. It bears the profile of a young child, a boy, perhaps, and around the edge of the medal is the following inscription:

“•LVDOVICVS•XIIII•D•G•FR•ET•NAV•REX•”

At the bottom edge of the medal is the following inscription: “WvA 1651”. The longer inscription is latin and stands for: Ludovici XIII, Dei Gratia Franciae et Navarrae Rex (Louis XIV, by the Grace of God King of France and Navarre). The shorter inscription at the bottom is van Aelst’s initials along with the year 1651. The medal depicts the very young Louis XIV, who had just come of age in 1651, when his mother, Anne of Austria, ceased to be his guardian and he began his personal rule, together with the Prime Minister, Cardinal Jules Mazarin, who was to die in 1661. Indeed, the medal can be identified as a 1643 medal produced by the renowned medalist Jean Warin, picturing the young Louis XIV on the obverse and Anne of Austria on the reverse (Figure 11).⁴⁶ Mere possession of such a medal seems evidence of royal favor and to depict one so

l’Imprimerie Artistique, 2004). 30. The detail of this panel mark will gain further significance at the close of this section.

⁴⁶ Mark Jones, *A Catalogue of the French Medals in the British Museum*, vol. Two: 1600-1672 (London: British Museum Publications, 1988). 200-201. the Medal which is the closest match to that depicted in the painting is Cat. 200.

prominently without actually having been awarded a medal would have been the very height of impertinence and likely a risky endeavor. Therefore it is possible to view the painting as confirmation of a royal gift.⁴⁷ This implication of royal favor suggests that the relationship between Willem van Aelst and Philippe de Champaigne, favorite painter of the French royal house, may well have been substantial. Champaigne is the only apparent connection between van Aelst and the monarchy and Willem's possession of the medal seems unlikely without such a connection. In addition to further confirming his ties with Philippe de Champaigne, the painting also serves to place van Aelst in France in 1651 and is therefore a significant document in the biography of van Aelst.⁴⁸

It should be noted, moreover, that the manner in which van Aelst has signed this 1651 painting is an act of remarkable hubris for so young an artist. Study of the 1643 medal reveals that van Aelst has chosen to sign his painting in precisely the same spot that Warin, himself a respected and successful artist, signed the original medal. What this says about van Aelst's developing self-consciousness is noteworthy and will be discussed at greater length in chapter five.

⁴⁷ A classic discussion of the significance of chains and medals and their potential meanings can be found in the essay: Julius Held, "Rembrandt's Aristotle," in *Rembrandt's Aristotle and Other Rembrandt Studies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969). See particularly pages 32-41. The same medal also appeared, much less distinctly, in an undated painting by Willem Kalf, likely executed between 1643 and 1644. Lucius Grisebach, *Willem Kalf: 1619-1693* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1974). 108-109. Whether van Aelst saw Kalf's painting, or whether the medal or studies of it circulated among the foreign artists in Paris is unknown.

⁴⁸ It is my opinion that the medal given to van Aelst by the Medici that Houbraken refers to in Willem's biography, may actually be this medal bestowed by the French royal house. It is entirely possible that Houbraken knew simply of a medal, and given van Aelst's success in Italy and later adoption of the Italianate form of his name, made the reasonable assumption that that medal was Italian, not French. It is also possible that van Aelst received a second medal from the Medici, however no documentation or record of such a gift exists.

The final French-period work to be discussed is the 1649 fruitpiece now in the possession of the Museum het Prinsenhof in Delft (Figure 6). An intimately related painting by the painter and dealer Jean-Michel Picart forms a further point of discussion (Figure 12). The painting that is now in Delft is a strong example of the sort of work that van Aelst was producing during his time in France. In comparison with the 1646 fruit piece discussed above, (Figure 4), a striking development in compositional maturity can be observed. Notwithstanding the obvious differences in scale and ambition, it is clear that van Aelst's approach to space has undergone a dramatic shift in the three years since his departure from his native city.⁴⁹ The modest handful of sketchy, somewhat roughly painted fruit on a bare stone slab has been supplanted by a sumptuous assortment of plums and peaches, an exotic melon and a tangle of curving, twisting leaves arrayed on an expensive marble table with a gold-fringed blue cloth. The more affluent, indeed, the particular French, market to which van Aelst was trying to appeal is evident in the ultimate effect of the later painting.⁵⁰ Van Aelst has also clearly learned a great deal about building a complex composition. He uses the leaves of the branches to create a pronounced triangular composition, and to introduce drama into the painting. This device is visible in its early stages in the 1646 painting with the loose sprig of grapes and the shadowy leaf, but the level of sophistication is simply not yet present. In addition, van Aelst has also begun to learn how to flaunt his skill as a fine painter. The manner in

⁴⁹ The Weldon painting is on copper and is 16.75 x 21.75 cm. The Delft painting is on canvas and its dimensions are 53.5 x 65 cm. It should be noted that when I examined the painting in Delft it was explained to me that the painting still displayed some old retouching.

⁵⁰ The nature of the French market and the fine, polished taste that seemed to be preferred, is discussed at some length in Marchi and Miegroet, "Novelty." See particularly page 223-226.

which he depicts the blue cloth is an excellent example of this. Rather than simply covering the table smoothly, he folds back the corner of the cloth, thus enabling the display not only of his ability to paint velvet (the outer face of the cloth) but also to paint a smooth fabric like silk or satin (the inner face). This kind of juxtaposition, along with the diagonally activated composition will become hallmarks of his later work.

The undated painting by Jean Michel Picart (Figure 12) is intimately related to the 1649 fruitpiece. The painting is a large work (115.6 x 159.4 cm) and shares a similar tonality with the van Aelst painting. The subject matter differs markedly, the main focus of the composition being a basket overflowing with roses, anemones, tulips and African marigolds. However, closer examination reveals a relatively small grouping of fruit on the right edge of the painting. Comparison with the 1649 painting by van Aelst confirms that the small cluster of fruit in the Picart work is virtually identical to the fruit in the 1649 Delft composition.⁵¹ Picart renders his grouping of fruit in a somewhat looser manner, choosing not to use the meticulous glazing technique that characterizes van Aelst's work.⁵² The detailed nature of van Aelst's rendering suggests that it was probably the model for Picart. Not only does this quotation of van Aelst's composition help to confirm his presence in France, it adds a layer of complexity to his presence there. In addition to being a painter, Jean Michel Picart was also a reputable dealer of paintings

⁵¹ The initial observation of this remarkable quotation was made by Fred G. Meijer of the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie in The Hague in a report he made for the Art Dealer Richard Green, who now holds the painting.

⁵² The comparative observations are based on Fred G. Meijer's assessment of the Picart painting. I was unfortunately not able to examine the work firsthand, but close study of a good reproduction confirms his observations.

and other luxury goods. He was engaged in a lively art trade with his colleague in Antwerp, Matthijs Musson, who supplied him with lower cost paintings and luxury goods made in Antwerp for the Paris market.⁵³ The relationship between the paintings by van Aelst and Picart is highly suggestive and a description of the arrival in Paris of the Flemish painter Philip Vleughels suggests a possible explanation.

In a document from 1727-1737, the son of the Flemish painter Philip Vleughels describes his father's journey south to Paris and his subsequent reception there in 1642.⁵⁴ Vleughels and a travel companion ultimately were received in a house called "La Chasse" in the Parisian neighborhood of Saint-Germain-des Prés, where they had dinner with a number of other Flemish painters, as well as the Dutch painter Willem Kalf. The following day Willem Kalf took Vleughels to the workshop of flower painter and dealer Jean-Michel Picart, where Vleughels was able to find work.⁵⁵ From this story we learn that Jean-Michel Picart was willing to take foreign artists into his workshop, house them and give them work to do. The implications for van Aelst, in light of the two pictures discussed above, is that he was likely working in Picart's workshop for at least some time during his stay in Paris. Unfortunately the manner in which he initially met Picart

⁵³ Marchi and Miegroet, "Novelty." details this complex relationship. The two authors examine the intricate knowledge the Picart had of the Paris market and demonstrate how he specifically tailored his orders to glean works that would be most appealing and saleable.

⁵⁴ This account is cited in Grisebach, *Kalf*. 14-15, and reproduced in Appendix II, 197-198. It was first reproduced in L. Dussieux et. al, *Mémoires inédits sur la vie et les ouvrages des membres de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* (Paris, 1854) vol. 1, 355-357. In the new exhibition catalogue on Willem Kalf, it is suggested that Grisebach incorrectly dated this document, and that it actually dates not to 1642, but to 1643-44, Jeroen Giltaij et al., *Gemaltes Licht: Die Stilleben von Willem Kalf 1619-1693* (München and Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2007). 11-12. For our purposes, the precise date is not as significant.

⁵⁵ Grisebach, *Kalf*. 15, 198.

remains a mystery. It is possible that he already knew of Picart before his arrival, or that he was introduced by another artist when he first came to the city. Indeed, there is a very slight overlap between van Aelst's arrival in 1645/6 and Willem Kalf's departure from Paris in 1646.⁵⁶ The presence of the two artists in Paris at the same time is compelling, however there is no real information to suggest that they met one another. One fascinating detail does seem to at least connect them both to one supplier for their panels. The panel mark discussed above, by the Antwerp panel maker Melchior de Bout also appears on the back of a number of Kalf's Paris period paintings, including a loosely painted farmyard scene in the collection of the Suermondt-Ludwig Museum in Aachen.⁵⁷ Regardless, the relationship van Aelst clearly had with Picart both confirms the presence of van Aelst in France, and exposes some of the connections he made there.

Italy and the Medici: The Development of the Professional Artist

The painting of the medallion discussed above further suggests that in 1651 or early 1652 Willem van Aelst traveled to Italy, where he began what was arguably the most formative period of his career. Unlike the evidence we possess surrounding his work in France, the material regarding van Aelst's Italian sojourn is much more concrete and specific. Houbraken and Bleyswijk tell us that van Aelst was in Italy for seven years

⁵⁶ Kalf had returned to Rotterdam from Paris by October 1646 at the very latest. Grisebach, *Kalf*. 17.

⁵⁷ Thomas Fusenig and Christine Vogt, *Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum Aachen: Bestandskatalog der Gemäldegalerie Niederlande von 1550 bis 1800* (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2006). 152-3, 147. It is my belief that Picart was importing panels for his workshop from Antwerp and that one of his suppliers was Melchior de Bout. The discovery of the same panel mark on the backs of a number of paintings by other painters who were also working in Paris during this period is suggestive of such a wider network. I am currently researching this material further and plan to publish an article with my findings.

and that he was esteemed by Cardinals, Princes and Lords.⁵⁸ While his highly placed patronage can be substantiated, the evidence suggests that the length of van Aelst's stay in Italy was shorter than seven years, and more likely it was closer to five or six years. The evidence about his Italian sojourn comprises a series of letters with specific references to van Aelst, contemporary inventories mentioning his pictures, as well as eleven paintings that are still present in the collections of the Palazzo Pitti and the Museo degli Uffizi today.⁵⁹ Modern biographies of the artist note that van Aelst spent his time in Florence, and worked at the Medici Court, but the precise nature of his service to the Medici is only indicated by Silvia Mascalchi, who also emphasizes that fact that van Aelst moved around while he was in Italy.⁶⁰ Indeed, while in Italy van Aelst interacted with a number of different figures, including Fabrizio Piermattei and Paolo del Sera, and while at court seems to have done the majority of his work for Cardinal Giovan Carlo de Medici, as well as Cardinal Leopoldo de Medici.

What is curious is precisely how van Aelst moved so directly from France into favor at the Medici court. It is certainly tempting to speculate that his interactions in France with the well connected dealer Jean Michel Picart and his potential royal favor as

⁵⁸ Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol. 1, 228-230.

⁵⁹ The paintings can be found in Marco Chiarini and Serena Padovani, *La Galleria Palatina e gli Appartamenti Reali di Palazzo Pitti Catalogo dei Dipinti*, vol. II (Florence: Centro Di, 2003). The van Aelst paintings have the following inventory numbers: Inv. 1912 n. 454; Inv. 1912 n. 466; Inv. 1912 n. 468; Inv. 1912 n. 469; Inv. OdA 1911 n. 498; Inv. OdA 1911 n. 508; Inv. Oda 1911 n. 509; Inv. OdA 1911 n. 561; Inv. 1890 n. 1209; Inv. Poggio Imperiale n. 1225. The painting in the Uffizi is Inv. 1890 n. 1245.

⁶⁰ Silvia Mascalchi, "Il Cardinale Giovan Carlo (1611-1663)," in *Il Giardino del Granduca: Natura Morta nelle Collezione Medicee*, ed. Marco Chiarini (Torino: Seat, 1997). For van Aelst see: 124-130. Modern biographies that include mention of the Italian period include but are not limited to: Chong and Kloek, eds., *Still-Life Paintings From the Netherlands 1550-1720*. 288; Bergström, *Dutch.*; Meijer, *Ward*. 146. Of all of these works that feature biographies of van Aelst, Silvia Mascalchi's is by far the most thorough on the Italian period of his career. However, it is not the objective of Mascalchi to tell the full story of van Aelst, and we must therefore fill in the gaps her broader narrative leaves.

manifest in the medal so prominently displayed in his 1651 painting helped to ease his passage at the Medici court. In addition to these possibilities, the presence of the painter Otto Marseus van Schrieck in Rome beginning in approximately 1649 would have provided van Aelst with a northern contact.⁶¹ Indeed, in his biography of Otto Marseus van Schrieck, Houbraken suggests that van Aelst was a disciple of van Schrieck's and that van Aelst and van Schrieck together "carried out many pranks."⁶² Although I find it unlikely that van Aelst was a student of van Schrieck's, given the level of success and sophistication his work had already achieved by 1651, it is possible that the older artist may have taken the younger van Aelst under his wing to some extent. However, the evidence of van Aelst's Italian period suggests that van Aelst began his work in Florence, not in Rome, and only began work in Rome in 1653.⁶³ Precisely when van Aelst and van Schrieck met, therefore, and what the circumstances of that meeting were, remain unclear.

Although the precise nature of van Aelst's introductions at the Medici court remains unknown, a series of letters suggests the character of the relationship. The first letter dates to November 9, 1652. This is towards the end of the first full year that van Aelst could have spent in Florence. By this point, he had completed at least seven paintings for both Cardinal Giovan Carlo de Medici and Cardinal Leopoldo de Medici,

⁶¹ Douglas Hildebrecht, "Otto Marseus van Schrieck (1619/20-1678) and the Nature Piece: Art, Science, Religion and the Seventeenth-Century Pursuit of Natural Knowledge" (University of Michigan, 2004). 52. Hildebrecht places Otto Marseus van Schrieck in Rome at 1649 at latest.

⁶² Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol. I, 358.

⁶³ Letters to be discussed below substantiate this suggestion as does Mascalchi's discussion of van Aelst's work for Giovan Carlo de Medici.

the two members of the family for whom he worked most directly. This group of paintings formed the majority of the work he was to accomplish for the Medici Court. The letter in question was sent by Fabrizio Piermattei, presumably a Roman dealer, to Cardinal Giovan Carlo.⁶⁴ Fabrizio Piermattei first surfaces in relation to the Medici in April of 1650. At this time, Cardinal Leopoldo was on an impromptu visit to Rome, and notes that he saw some of Piermattei's pictures at the Medici Palace at Piazza Madama.⁶⁵ The letter of November 9, 1652, is therefore an extension of a relationship with the Medici family that had existed, at least since 1650. The letter reads as follows:

Most serene and revered Prince, the little picture by your Dutch painter that Your Highness deigned to send to me has now been seen by the connoisseurs of this city, and it has been highly praised and judged to be of the finest taste, not to be surpassed. And in truth, I too admire greatly the handling of colors done with most delicacy such that it seems that it is on the same par as what nature herself produces. If you send him to Rome you should be certain that his career will advance wonderfully and if he resolves to paint with the same good style things that move, he would achieve great status, and I would not fail to avail myself of his services...⁶⁶

The letter communicates on multiple levels. At its most fundamental, it describes how Cardinal Giovan Carlo sent a small picture by van Aelst to Piermattei in an attempt,

⁶⁴ ASF, Archivio Mediceo del Principato 5320, c. 781. This letter is first cited in Mascalchi, "Cardinale." 128-129. It is from this text that I take the bulk of the transcription of the letter. I am grateful to Paul Barolsky for assisting me in the translation of this letter.

⁶⁵ This visit is described in some detail by Edward L. Goldberg, *After Vasari: History, Art, and Patronage in Late Medici Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). 19. Although Piermattei's profession is never specified, Goldberg suspects that he is a dealer, a suggestion borne out by the letters relating to van Aelst.

⁶⁶ The Italian text of the letter is as follows: *Ser.mo e Rev.mo Principe si è visto finora dalli piu intendenti di questa citta il quadretto che V.A.za si è degnata mandarmi fatto dal suo pittore olandese, che è stato comendato in estremo, dicendo ciascheduno che con miglior gusto non si puo dipingere. Et in vero io ho ammirato il maneggio dei colori condotto con tanta morbidezza, che par che vada del pari con la natura. Se V.A. lo manda a Roma sia certa che si avvanzerà mirabilmente e se si risolvesse a dipingere con lo stesso buono stile le cose che si muovono, piglierebbe oggi un gran posto, ne' io mancherò di ben servirlo...*

presumably, to extend his renown. It indicates too that, upon approval of his picture, van Aelst received an invitation to Rome. Moreover, the letter also hints at a rich network of connoisseurs and dealers, an art community which would have received van Aelst in Rome and helped to advance his reputation. On another level, we see, towards the end of the letter that, although the still life paintings he painted were clearly appreciated, true fame would be achieved by painting things that move: *le cose che si muovono*. The letter suggests a certain generosity and good will on the part of Giovan Carlo, who is not only willing to share his artist, but who is also willing to advance van Aelst's career by making the connections only he can make. The implication in this situation is that van Aelst was indeed highly esteemed. Under two years after his arrival from France he is not only working for the Medici Court, but has received the favor, quite literally, of Cardinal Giovan Carlo.

Evidently, Piermattei was quite taken with the work of van Aelst and writes to Giovan Carlo about the artist twice in the subsequent month.⁶⁷ The first is dated to November 16, 1652 and refers to van Aelst at its close. Piermattei again expresses his pleasure at van Aelst's painting and notes how he wants to send brushes to the artist but does not know which sort van Aelst prefers.⁶⁸ A second letter on December 6th,

⁶⁷ The two letters are ASF Archivio Mediceo del Principato 5320, cc. 811 and ASF Archivio Mediceo del Principato 5320, 703. Both letters date within one month of the November 9, 1652 letter and both are cited in Mascalchi, "Cardinale." 129. I am grateful to Francesca Fiorani for her generous assistance in untangling the difficult script of these letters.

⁶⁸ ASF Archivio Mediceo del Principato 5320 811R

again mentions a new group of brushes for van Aelst that Piermattei had had “made with the greatest care” (*fatti con miglior diligenza*).⁶⁹

Finally, on December 20, 1653 two letters appear, written by Fabrizio Piermattei to Giovan Carlo in which Piermattei announces the arrival of van Aelst in Rome, and calls him “a gallant man” (*un gallant huomo*).⁷⁰ He also describes how he will make van Aelst’s work known. It is clear from Piermattei’s letter that this is his first encounter with van Aelst. Therefore we can comfortably place van Aelst’s first official visit to Rome in December of 1653. The second letter, also from the same date, is written in a much finer script and appears to be more of an official record of an agreement between Piermattei and Giovan Carlo.⁷¹ It contains roughly the same promises to effectively look after van Aelst and make sure he is given work and opportunities.

Just over a month later, on January 30, 1654 another letter arrives from Piermattei signaling the end of van Aelst’s short-lived time in Rome.⁷² It is this letter which is the most revealing of the group, and is again addressed to Giovan Carlo. This letter explicitly describes the circumstances surrounding the hasty conclusion of

⁶⁹ This quotation comes from: ASF Archivio Mediceo del Principato 5320 703v

⁷⁰ ASF, Archivio Mediceo del Principato 5326, 334v.

⁷¹ ASF, Archivio Mediceo del Principato 5326, 441r. Both letters are mentioned in Mascalchi, "Cardinale." 129. Once again, I am grateful for Francesca Fiorani’s assistance with the script of these letters and the interpretation of their import.

⁷² ASF Archivio Mediceo del Principato 5326, c. 905. Referred to in Mascalchi, "Cardinale.", 129-130.

van Aelst's trip that had begun scarcely a month earlier on December 20, 1653. The letter is dated to the 30th of January 1654.⁷³

Already two days ago the Dutch painter had some misfortune and had to fight/quarrel with some French, he remains unharmed, but the other was wounded almost to the death. He resolved to leave quickly, and I was pleased since he was in danger of going to prison, and incurring a great unpleasantness. Many who had expected the viewing, and enjoyment of his pictures, will now not receive this fortune. With me remained the trunk with his clothing which I have sent to Florence with the first shipment, since he has set out on this (unfortunate) path...

This document reveals important details about the relationship between van Aelst and Piermattei, and about van Aelst's character. Fundamentally, we learn that van Aelst had been set to Rome under the protection of Giovan Carlo and Fabrizio Piermattei. This visit clearly seems to have been geared towards developing an audience and a taste for van Aelst's work. While in Rome he appears to have developed a certain popularity, such that his abrupt departure causes Piermattei to remark on the disappointment of those expecting to see the work of van Aelst. In fact, we know quite conclusively that van Aelst's work had been acquired by at least one Roman patron. Two of his paintings appear in the inventory of the great collector, Cassiano del Pozzo, and are described as "Altro con pesci Locuste di Guglielmo Vaalest" and "altro quadruccio di Guglielmo

⁷³ ASF Archivio Mediceo del Principato 5326, c. 905. I would like to thank Paul Barolsky and Deborah Parker for kindly helping me with this translation. The Italian text of the letter is as follows: *Già sono due giorni che il pittore olandese ebbe disgrazia e necessità di far questione con alcuni francesi, resta egli illeso, ma ferì l'altro con pericolo di morte. Si rissolve di partir subito, et a me piacque per il pericolo di andar prigione, et incorrere in maggiori disgusti. Molti qui aspettano di vedere, e godere delle sue pitture, ma non hanno avuto questa fortuna. Mi è rimasto il baule con le sue robe che io invierò a Firenze con la prima condotta, giacchè egli si è incamminato verso codesta volta...*

Vanlest con'un'Gattino, prisciutto, cascio, e pane.”⁷⁴ Neither of the two works are specific enough to describe identifiable paintings. The first of the two works contains fish, a subject fairly common to his work at the time. The second of the two paintings purports to depict a cat, among other elements like prosciutto and bread. Although cats depicted among or stealing food was not an uncommon subject in Dutch painting, it does not appear in the oeuvre of van Aelst. It is interesting to speculate that perhaps this painting was van Aelst's attempt to paint *le cose che si muovono*. The subject's absence in the rest of his oeuvre may suggest a lack of success in his rendering of this theme. Certainly, however, it indicates van Aelst's apparent willingness to execute paintings that, while not traditionally in his repertoire, responded to the desires of his patrons. Regardless of subject matter, the fact that the paintings made their way into such an illustrious collection is suggestive of the success that van Aelst achieved in his brief visit to Rome and implies that the disappointment that Piermattei writes of is most likely genuine.

In addition to the more positive implications of success, the letter also carries undeniably negative implications about van Aelst's character. Indeed, this incident suggests that Houbraken's assessment of van Aelst's “grand disposition” and confrontational nature holds some germ of truth. What this window into van Aelst's

⁷⁴ Donatella L. Sparti, *Le collezioni dal Pozzo Storia di una famiglia e del suo museo nella Roma seicentesca* (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini Editore, 1992). 217, 221. The inventory is actually of Gabriele dal Pozzo, Cassiano dal Pozzo's nephew. Moreover, these paintings and the inventory of Gabriele dal Pozzo can be found on the Provenance Index Database provided by the Getty Research Institute as items 038 and 044 from Archival Document I-966 (Pozzo). The inventory was also published by Sparti in 1990 in Donatella L. Sparti, "The dal Pozzo Collection again: The Inventories of 1689 and 1695 and the Family," *The Burlington Magazine* 132, no. 1049 (1990).

behavior also provides us with is the suggestion that there was a larger community, presumably of artists, in which van Aelst was circulating while he was in Italy. Perhaps this sort of incident is an example of one of the “pranks” to which Houbraken referred, when mentioning van Aelst in the biography of Otto Marseus van Schrieck.⁷⁵ Although there is no firm evidence that van Aelst was ever involved with the *Bentvueghels*, the informal society of foreign, mostly Dutch artists living in Rome, it seems plausible that he may have had at least some interaction with them, especially given van Schrieck’s membership in the group. The likelihood that the *Bentvueghels* were involved in this particular incident increases when one considers not only their rowdy reputation but also their notorious friction with the French artistic community in Rome in the second half of the seventeenth-century, precisely the period to which this incident dates.⁷⁶ The tension with the French artistic community was largely due to the French school’s movement towards a more classicizing style and their increasing disdain for what they regarded as the less polished style represented by the *Bentvueghels*.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, existing records of the *Bentvueghels* make it difficult to confirm or deny van Aelst’s involvement with the

⁷⁵ Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol 1. 358.

⁷⁶ Wendy Thompson, “*Pigmei pizzicano di Gigante*: The Encounter Between Netherlandish and Italian Artists in Seventeenth-Century Rome” (Johns Hopkins University, 1997). 173-188. The “rowdy reputation” carried by the *Bentvueghels* is now held to be more reputation than fact. In his 1990 essay, David Levine argues convincingly for the redemption of the group. In the essay, Levine counters that the Bentvueghel traditions were intimately tied to the model of the *rederijker*’s (rhetorician’s) guild, a model which stressed the importance of paradox and irony. David A. Levine, “The Bentvueghels “Bande Académique”,” in *Essays Honoring Irving Lavin on his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin (New York: Italica Press, 1990). The classic source on Northern artists in Rome is: G. J. Hoogewerff, *Nederlandsche kunstenaars te Rome (1600-1725) uittreksels uit de Parochiale Archieven*, vol. III, *Studiën van het Nederlandsch Historisch Instituut te Rome* (The Hague: Gedrukt Ter Algemeene Landsdrukkerij, 1942).

⁷⁷ Thompson, “Pigmei”. 173-188

group, though given his relationship with Otto Marseus van Schrieck, it seems quite likely that he knew the group, even if he was not a member himself.⁷⁸

The final document in the group of letters relates to the departure of van Aelst from Italy. This time the letter is sent by a different correspondent, Paolo del Sera, the connoisseur, correspondent and man responsible for buying art for Cardinal Leopoldo in Venice.⁷⁹ Indeed, the letter was sent to Cardinal Leopoldo and dates to March 25, 1656.⁸⁰

There arrived at my door Thursday at noon *Mons. Guglielmo van Aelst* Painter of fruits, from whom I received the ... favor of Your Highness, but he did not want to even enter inside the threshold of the door, saying that he was in a hurry to leave Venice I urged him to remain at least long enough to be able to see some of the most important things... he replied firmly that he already sent ahead to stop with his horses in Padua and that he did not want to stay for a period in Venice, I asked him why, he answered me: because the wine was lousy, Your Highness senses: I discovered a bit of Montepulciano and sent six flasks that I believed had the power to detain him for three days, but from what *Monsu Montagna Painter of Storms at Sea* grumbled as he arrived here staggering drunk this evening, they drank said wine very quickly with continuous toasts

⁷⁸ There will be further discussion of the implications of this interaction and a possible link to the *Bentvueghels* in Chapter five.

⁷⁹ Edward L. Goldberg, *Patterns in Late Medici Art Patronage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). For Paolo del Sera see particularly chapter three.

⁸⁰ H. Geisenheimer, "Beitrage zur Geschichte des Niederländischen Kunsthandels in der zweite Hälfte des XVII. Jahrhunderts. Dem Florentiner Staatsarchiv entnommen," *Jahrbuch der königlich preuszischen Kunstsammlungen* XXXII, no. Beiheft (1911). 37-38, note 5. The original letter can be found in ASF: Lettere Artistiche Vol. V, c. 73. I would like to thank Paul Barolsky and Deborah Parker for helping me with the translation of this letter. The Italian text of the letter is as follows: *Arrivò qui alla mia Porta giovedì mezzo giorno Mons. Guglielmo van Aelst Pittore di frutti, dal quale ricevetti la... favoritissima di V.A., ma non voles neanche entrare dentro la soglia della porta, dicendo che haveva fretta d'andar via di Venetia l'esortai a trattenersi almeno tanto che potessi vedere le cosi piu notabili... mi rispose risolutamente che haveva gia mandato a posta a fermare i cavalla per Padova e che non voleva star punto in Venetia, gli domandai perche, mi rispose: perchè il vino è cattivo, V.A. sente: lo me ne ritrovavo un poco di Montepulciano e gliene mandai sei fiaschi che credo l'haverebbero potuto trattenerne tre giorni, ma per quanto mi borbottò Monsu Montagna Pittor di Tempeste di Mare, che venne qui barcollando hiersera imbrocchio mercio, bevettero presto presto il ditto vino con continui brindisi con parecchi fiaschi di Moscado del Palicchi alla salute di V.A. e del Ser.^{mo} Gran Duca e poi se n' andò via: Quanto a me io credo che quest' Huomo habbia da tornar presto costà perchè V.A. l'ha tratto tanto bene, non solo a vini ma a tutte l'altre cose che ogn'altro Paese gli parrà un'inferno....*

with many flasks of Moscado del Palicchi to the health of Your Highness and of The Grand Duke and then he wouldn't go on his way: As for me I believe that this man should return there quickly because Your Highness has treated him quite well, not only with regards to wine but also regarding all the other things that in every other country would be like a hell to him...

This letter appears to be the last Italian document regarding van Aelst before his return to the Netherlands. Indeed, 1656 is the year that Houbraken gives for his return home, and in March 1657 the first documents appear that place him in Amsterdam.⁸¹ For this reason it is a valuable document, however it is also remarkably revealing both in terms of the relationship between Paolo del Sera and Cardinal Leopoldo, as well as in terms of the character of van Aelst. In addition it gives some clues about the manner in which van Aelst's Italian sojourn came to a close.

The reverential candor with which Paolo del Sera conveys the story of van Aelst's peculiar visit and his own attempts to detain him is typical of the long correspondence that existed between Paolo del Sera and Cardinal Leopoldo.⁸² Indeed, the frankness with which he communicates the impertinence of van Aelst is most striking, suggesting that he must have been quite affected by van Aelst's response to his inquiry about remaining in Venice. Also notable is the degree to which Paolo del Sera felt a responsibility to keep van Aelst in Venice, presumably for the benefit of Cardinal Leopoldo who he suggests had "treated him quite well". It is also possible that del Sera, himself a notable

⁸¹ Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol.1 228; Bredius, "Drie." 292. The specific context of these Amsterdam documents will be considered below in relation to the discussion of van Aelst's Amsterdam period.

⁸² Goldberg is especially revealing on the subject of the relationship of Paolo del Sera and Cardinal Leopoldo. Goldberg, *Patterns*. Chapter 3. Other sources for Paolo del Sera include: Gloria Chiarini de Anna, "Nove lettere di Paolo del Sera a Leopoldo de' Medici," *Paragone* XXVI, no. 307 (1975).; Jennifer Fletcher, "Marco Boschini and Paolo del Sera: Collectors and Connoisseurs," *Apollo* (1979).

connoisseur and buyer of art, had hoped to take some advantage of the artist's presence in Venice. However, the simple fact that del Sera is informing Cardinal Leopoldo of his attempts suggests otherwise. Indeed del Sera's statement to Cardinal Leopoldo that he believed that van Aelst should return to Florence bears the implication that the departure does not come as a complete surprise and perhaps was the result of some kind of falling out between van Aelst and his Medici patrons. Del Sera's concluding remarks sound as if they are attempting to smooth over a difficult or uncomfortable situation.

In terms of the character of van Aelst, the letter is exceptionally revealing, especially in light of the previous letter regarding his hasty departure from Rome. Once again, the events and the personality described in the letter seem to correspond with Houbraken's description of van Aelst's character and love of drink. In addition, his unsophisticated knowledge of his social place, so scorned by Houbraken, is highlighted by his brusque treatment of del Sera, a respected figure and agent of Cardinal Leopoldo. Moreover, although del Sera never communicates the real reason why, this letter once again describes van Aelst making a hasty departure. Although it is possible he was leaving quickly because of news or summons he received from home, the more likely scenario is probably a less innocent and blameless one.

In terms of the factual information the letter reveals, we learn quite conclusively that van Aelst had connections with other foreign artists. The peculiar figure who appears drunkenly at del Sera's door, *Monsu Montagna*, could be identifiable with Matthieu van Plattenberg, the Flemish painter and etcher who worked in Paris and signed his works

with variants on the French form of his name: Platte-Montagne.⁸³ In addition, we learn that at least within Italy, van Aelst traveled with horses, and that from Venice, he went to Padua. This trajectory could very well have taken him further north-west towards France and then homewards, suggesting that this incident may indeed have been the last contact he made before returning home. Unfortunately, the letter is not conclusive enough, nor is there enough other evidence to determine this incontrovertibly. Given, however, that he is documented in the Netherlands a year later it is probable that this letter effectively marks his departure.

The paintings that van Aelst created during his Italian period are truly remarkable objects. They reveal an increased maturity, sense of scale and magnificence as well as a remarkably sophisticated understanding of the patrons for whom he was working. Because of their great number, I will discuss two that are exemplary of the group and that will communicate the development his work underwent in relation to the paintings he created while in France.

The earliest of his Italian pictures dates to 1652 (indeed, there are at least six from this year). A strong example from this year is a large fruit piece with assorted precious vessels (Figure 13). The painting is vertical in format and has a more monumental quality

⁸³Geisenheimer, "Beitrage zur Geschichte des Niederländischen Kunsthandels in der zweite Hälfte des XVII. Jahrhunderts. Dem Florentiner Staatsarchiv entnommen."38. If Geisenheimer is indeed correct and Matthieu van Plattenberg is the painter mentioned in the letter, it would mean that he had come to Venice from Paris where he was working and was a founding member of the *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* in 1648. Indeed, it is possible that van Aelst had met Plattenberg while he himself was in France. Jean-Michel Picart, who collaborated with van Aelst on his monumental still life (discussed above), was a member of the Paris Guild of St. Luke from 1640 and the *Académie Royale* from 1651, could be a possible connection between Plattenberg and van Aelst. It is possible to speculate that van Aelst may have met up with Plattenberg to travel back to France and then homeward.

than his earlier works.⁸⁴ In this painting we see the full maturity of his early successes in France. Depicted on a table draped with blue and white cloths is a complex composition dominated by a large melon with several slices removed. The verisimilitude of this massive fruit is remarkable, with careful description not only of the leathery green cracked-open skin, but also of the rich orange flesh with masses of seeds both packed neatly within and spilling out onto the silver platter. To the left of and partially in front of the melon is a gold metal tazza whose shell-shaped bowl is supported by a crouching male figure on the back of some sort of sea creature and crowned by a small figure, possibly bacchic, brandishing a ring. Although not specifically identifiable, the tazza is typical of the sort of luxury object that van Aelst would have seen in the Medici court.⁸⁵ Curling up behind and over the melon and objects below is a sculptural grape vine, marked by large expressive leaves and accented with small corkscrew flourishes. The leaves help to fill out the composition and work to create a strong pyramidal shape, a device that will become commonplace in van Aelst's work. Lying on the tablecloth, to either side of the melon are plums, marked by the hazy bloom and mottled surface that van Aelst refines in France, and what seem to be small, ovoid apricots, splitting open in an echo of the melon. A yellow stone-handled knife protrudes off of the front of the table and refracts the light that shines through it. Towering above the composition and providing an expressive foil for the objects around it is a large, lidded goblet, either made of glass or crystal, with an elaborately designed stem and finial. The goblet does not

⁸⁴ The painting is 73 x 58 cm. The catalogue containing the most complete information on the painting is: Chiarini, *Galerie*. 5-8. For updated information also see Chiarini and Padovani, *Palatina*. 20-24.

⁸⁵ A more specific incident of an identifiable object will be discussed below in chapter 4.

appear to hold any liquid, rather takes its color from the objects around it, coloring yellow as a grape leaf passes behind it and vividly reflecting the blue of the table cloth. The masterful manner in which the goblet is painted causes it to vie for attention with the remarkable melon, entirely different objects but both painted with an assurance and a skill that has advanced beyond the somewhat tentative works created in Paris. The background of the work is a dark black-brown, offsetting the sparkling crystal and luscious fruit arrayed before it. The blue velvet cloth is painted in a remarkably vivid hue, and although I am not aware of any tests done on the pigment, van Aelst is known for using lapis lazuli in a number of his other paintings, a valuable pigment that would not have been untoward at the Medici court.⁸⁶ The white cloth that overlays the blue is a remarkable study in cool, creamy-blue whites, criss-crossed with crisp fold lines. It should also be noted, that this painting is one of a pair.⁸⁷ The other work is identical only in size and format, the subject matter is entirely different, featuring an elaborate vase of flowers on a blue-velvet draped tabletop with a gold pocket watch (Figure 14). The conceptual pairing of fruits and flowers is quite natural and is suitable subject matter for a pair of paintings. Although it would be fascinating to learn how the works were displayed, we only know that they belonged to Cardinal Giovan Carlo and were in his private chambers in the Villa di Castello when he died in 1663, likely hanging as a pair.⁸⁸ In addition to this pair, the works in the collection of the Palazzo Pitti also include two other pairs of paintings that are similarly unrelated aside from basic compositional

⁸⁶ Ingvar Bergström, "Wonderful Lapis Lazuli," *Tableau* 17, no. 6 (1995).

⁸⁷ Chiarini, *Galerie*. 5.

⁸⁸ ASF, *Miscellanea medicea* 31, ins. 10, inv. 1663, 5r

similarities to one another. Regardless of their status as pairs, however, the paintings are all able to stand alone as independent works. In particular the painting under discussion (Figure 13) is an exemplary work, characterizing the high degree of finish and compositional complexity found in his Italian paintings.

One final work bears examination as it is unique not only in the body of his Italian paintings, but also in the known oeuvre of van Aelst (Figure 15). This truly monumental work is notable not only for its tremendous size (195.5 x 137 cm) but also for its compositional complexity. Remarkably, this work too apparently once had a pendant, noted in the 1675 inventory of the possessions of Cardinal Leopoldo.⁸⁹ The pendant was noted to depict game and a greyhound.⁹⁰ Sadly, the pendant is now lost, although it is easy to imagine that the impression such a pair would have made must have been spectacular. This is truly still life on a monumental scale. The work that has come down to us is a remarkably ambitious one and in it, van Aelst tries his hand at the depiction of a composition that is no longer restricted to the top of a table.

In the right foreground of the painting we are faced with the back and side of an elaborate red and gold brocade chair whose upholstery is embellished with large reflective brass studs. Hanging over the back of the chair is a drawstring bag, most likely a game bag, made of velvet and accented with cording. Resting on the floor and leaning against the side of the chair, is a large gun with a wooden stock. Lying on the seat of the chair, a violin casts its shadow over a sheaf of papers lying beneath it. It is unclear

⁸⁹ Chiarini, *Galerie*, 18. The reference for the 1675 inventory is: ASF Guardaroba medicco 826 (1675), c. 61, n. 109.

⁹⁰ Chiarini, *Galerie*, 18.

whether the papers are intended to be a musical score, however they do appear to bear some sort of writing. The deep blue drapery of the table, velvet on one side, and smooth iridescent fabric on the other, also rests on the seat of the chair. To the left of the chair and beneath the table lies a range of objects including a crossbow, three different birds, one of which appears to be a turkey, and a basket containing a fish and a lobster. These objects, coupled with those displayed on the table above suggest the theme of an aristocratic man's pastimes or pursuits, hunting, fishing and making music. The table is remarkably elaborate; the leg alone is encrusted in gold mounts and supports a thick marble tabletop. On the corner of the table is a gold pocket watch with its case open to reveal the elaborate works inside and a gold chain that hangs down over the front of the marble table. Next to the pocket watch are two objects of extreme luxury, most likely inspired by the contents of the Medici household, a gold metal pitcher, elaborately decorated, and a richly ornamented nautilus cup. The nautilus cup, in fact, bears some resemblance to a pair of cups in the collection of the Museo degli Argenti in Florence, now housed in the Palazzo Pitti (Figure 16). The addition of the figure on the back of the lion's head and the taller stem can certainly be accounted for by artistic license.⁹¹ The two luxury objects rest on folds of the rich blue velvet cloth with gold fringe that drapes over the edge of the table and onto the seat of the chair. To the right of the pitcher and nautilus cup is a bountiful array of fruits including red and green grapes, figs, pomegranates and peaches. Once again twisting branches and leaves extend the composition upward to form a pleasing compositional form. The background of the

⁹¹ More examples of the direct depiction of objects in the Medici collections will be discussed in Chapter 4.

composition is largely dark, but the upper right hand corner reveals a red fringed curtain pulled up and aside and revealing a grouping of three thick red tassels.

The painting, taken in its entirety creates a picture of a wealthy individual. All of the appropriate trappings are present, from music, to evidence of the aristocratic sport of hunting, to the valuable luxury possessions, all depicted in the context of what the furniture and curtain help to define as an opulent interior. The painting also alludes to the five senses: the fruit for smell and taste, the violin for hearing, the thick velvet cloth and soft bird feathers for touch and the luxury objects might be considered appropriate objects to represent sight. The four elements might also be found in the painting. The fruit representing earth, the birds air, the fish water and the worked metal objects fire, as an allusion to the forge of Vulcan. These traditional associations certainly seem to exist within the painting, although they were not common, nor were they to become common, in the oeuvre of van Aelst. Perhaps the paintings within the Medici collection that depicted these traditional themes acted as inspiration for this major work. This painting, as is the case with a number of the paintings he created for the Medici, truly reveals van Aelst working to create paintings that would suit and appeal to his patrons. This studied approach to painting is, aside from his assumed Italianate identity and Medici connections, perhaps one of the most valuable things that van Aelst gleaned from his stay in Italy. The ramifications of this newly acquired skill will become more evident as we engage in further studies of his work and interactions with patrons.

Return to the Netherlands: the Birth of Guillhelmo

Arnold Houbraken states that 1656 is the year that van Aelst returned to the Netherlands. He also notes that “he settled first in Delft and then proceeded to Amsterdam, where his art was already held in high regard by all connoisseurs and was sold for high prices.”⁹² As discussed above, Houbraken is correct in reporting that 1656 was the year that van Aelst returned from Italy, however aside from Houbraken’s statement, there is very little evidence to suggest that van Aelst actually returned to Delft first. It has been suggested that he was there from 1656-1657 and that he stayed on the Oude Delft, in house number 169, which is known as the *Wapen van Savoyen*, a home that today houses the Gemeentearchief in Delft.⁹³ While there is evidence that this home was in the van Aelst family, Willem’s residence there in 1656-57 is undocumented. It is realistic to assume, however, that after approximately a decade abroad, he would return home, at least briefly.

That Willem van Aelst moved to Amsterdam by February 1657 is apparent because on February 19, 1657, Willem van Aelst’s uncle and teacher Evert van Aelst died and Willem was contacted in Amsterdam regarding the estate.⁹⁴ Indeed, Evert died not in wealth but in what appears to have been not inconsiderable poverty, as his meager

⁹² Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol. 1, 228-230.

⁹³ The suggestion that van Aelst was in Delft from 1656-1657 is by no means certain. See above, note 19 for more details on this. Moreover in a visit to the Gemeente Archief in Delft I was unable to confirm the suggestion.

⁹⁴ Bredius, "Drie." 291-2. Records of Notary Frans Boogert, Delft, 19 March, 1657. In an odd and somewhat alarming disclosure, we discover in the description of the notary Boogert and the testimony of Guilliaem Palmedes, a tailor in whose house Evert had been living, that Evert had actually died four weeks prior, on February 19, 1656. The inventory of his goods was not made until March 19.

inventory of bare essentials confirms.⁹⁵ The inventory contains, among basic household goods like bedding and clothing: a skull, four small panels depicting fruit still lifes, worked up in dead coloring, a portrait of Evert and a portrait of his mother, an easel and other brushes and “eenige rommeling van geen importansie” (lit: some other rubbish of no importance).⁹⁶ This death is significant, because it provides us with the first document to not only place van Aelst in Amsterdam, but to confirm his profession there as a painter. On the 20th of April, 1657, Willem van Aelst was contacted as the heir of the estate of his Uncle. Rather than collect his uncle’s belongings, Willem repudiated the estate and on the 21st of April 1657 empowered Guilliaem Palmedes to be the secretary for the estate. He instructed Palmedes to be responsible for the death taxes, which Willem van Aelst claimed had been paid as pennies spent in the illness of his uncle “*penningen verstreckt in de ziekte van zijn voorn. Oom.*”⁹⁷ In the April 20th document regarding his uncle’s estate, van Aelst is referred to as “Willem van Aelst, schilder, wonende te Amsterdam” and in the April 21st document he is referred to as “Willem van Aelst, wonende tot Amsterdam”.⁹⁸ Through the death of Evert van Aelst, therefore, we learn of the new life that van Aelst has taken up in the city of Amsterdam.

Shortly after this on May 5, 1657, Willem van Aelst appears in a document regarding an incident that occurred in Leiden, where he had stayed for fourteen days in the home of Adam Pick, a painter and wine merchant there. Pick, like van Aelst, was

⁹⁵ Records of Notary Frans Boogert, Delft, 19 March, 1657.

⁹⁶ Records of Notary Frans Boogert, Delft, 19 March, 1657.

⁹⁷ Records of Notary Frans Boogert, Delft, no. 2001, 20 April, 1657; Bredius, "Drie." 292. For further discussion of this incident and its context see also Montias, *Artists*. 130-131.

⁹⁸ Bredius, "Drie." 292.

originally from Delft and had also been a student of Evert van Aelst, although Pick's specialty was landscape painting. This short visit is only documented because van Aelst is asked to stand as a witness regarding this time period. In this case Juffrouw Anna van Dieverden, the housewife of Adam Pick, has requested that van Aelst testify to the fact that he had indeed stayed in Adam Pick's home for fourteen days and that during that time he had witnessed Adam Pick's brother, Cornelis Pick, kiss her against her will.⁹⁹ When precisely van Aelst was in Leiden is unclear as the dates of the document only record the time of his testimony not the time of his visit. It is tempting to speculate, given the proximity of his return home in 1656, that van Aelst stopped first not in Delft but in Leiden with his friend and former fellow pupil from Delft. This would account for the short duration of his stay because by February 1657 he was already known as an Amsterdam painter. It is possible that the trip to Leiden may also have been more than just a visit to an old friend, although it is unclear what van Aelst might have had to do in Leiden during those fourteen days. That Adam Pick was a wine merchant suggests that he may also have acted as a lower level dealer of paintings. It is possible that Willem van Aelst came to him to sell some of his paintings in order to improve his finances. There is no evidence of this, however. Nevertheless, the presence of a number of Willem van Aelst paintings in Leiden inventories suggests that his trip may indeed have been business related.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Bredius, *Künstler*. 203. Records of Notary Johannes Hellenus, Amsterdam, May 5, 1657. SAA 5075, NAA 2058, folio 250. (SAA stands for Stadsarchief Amsterdam, NAA for Notarial Archives, Amsterdam)

¹⁰⁰ These paintings appear in a number of the inventories printed by The Rapenburg project, a remarkable and ambitious project to document the homes and owners along the wealthy Leiden canal. Th. H. Lunsingh

The next reference that we find to Willem van Aelst is two years later on September 28, 1659. In this document, van Aelst appears as a witness on behalf of Nicolaes Outhuijs, a cheese merchant and Burger of Amsterdam. Van Aelst appears along with Johannes Holblock, who is also a painter. The two are asked to testify in response to an inquiry by Adam Pick, who we recently encountered in Leiden and who is now in the employ of the Estates General of the United Netherlands and who is bound for Denmark. Van Aelst and Holblock testify first of all to the fact that Nicolaes Outhuijs lives on the Bloemgracht in Amsterdam in a house next to Bloemendael. Moreover they testify to the fact that van Aelst rents two upper rooms from Outhuijs in which he only paints "*daer hij alleen in schildert.*" Finally they also testify to the fact that Outhuijs also allowed Adam Pick the use of a side room, in which he stayed at his own cost, for one day.¹⁰¹ The ultimate import of the case has little bearing on van Aelst's biography. For our purposes, the relevant information in this document relates to the location of the home in which van Aelst rents rooms for painting. Although it does not inform us where the house is located on the Bloemgracht, it does help to locate van Aelst within the city. The Bloemgracht is a relatively short residential canal in the north-west of the city near the wealthy new Prinsengracht. The Bloemgracht is in the newly built working class neighborhood known as the Jordaan, construction of which began in 1614. The

Scheurleer, C. Willemijn Fock, and A. J. van Dissel, *Het Rapenburg: Geschiedenis van een Leidse gracht*, 7 vols. (Leiden: 1992).

¹⁰¹ Bredius, *Kunstler*. 203-204. Bredius, "Archiefsprokkelingen." 266. Records of Notary Gilles Borsselaer, Amsterdam, 28 September, 1659. SAA 5075, NAA 1474, no folio number. For further information on Adam Pick see: Bredius, "Drie." 296-298.

Bloemgracht at this point was known as the *Looiersbuurt* or Tanners Neighborhood.¹⁰² It was the home of the Blaeu printing works, and would later be the home of Frederick Ruysch when he purchased a house there in 1685 as well as van Aelst's pupil Ernst Stuven in 1696.¹⁰³ What is especially interesting about this document is that it not only reveals that van Aelst was already in the company of fellow painters, but that he was renting rooms specifically in which to paint. It is unclear whether this was common practice, however it speaks to a degree of professionalism in that it implies that he did not practice his art in the space in which he lived.

The following year, in 1660, van Aelst's fortunes must have been affected by the publication of Cornelis de Bie's *Gulden Cabinet*. In this volume, which contains poems on a group of artists, there appears a laudatory poem on the work of van Aelst.¹⁰⁴ It is this poem that Dirck van Bleyswijck includes in his 1662 biography of van Aelst.¹⁰⁵ The poem praises van Aelst's imitative abilities, particularly his ability to paint metals, and expresses the traditional notion that van Aelst's painting was able to give life to the inanimate.¹⁰⁶ That his work was recognized so shortly after his return from abroad suggests that van Aelst was meeting with some critical success.

¹⁰² Paul Spies et al., *The Canals of Amsterdam* (The Hague: Uitgeverij Koninkinnegracht, 1991). 41, 232.

¹⁰³ Christopher Brown, Jan Kelch, and Pieter van Thiel, *Rembrandt: The Master and his Workshop* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991). 63. Luuc Kooijmans, *De doodskunstenaar: De anatomische lessen van Frederik Ruysch* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2004). 160. Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol. III, 377.

¹⁰⁴ Bie, *Gulden*. 291.

¹⁰⁵ See beginning of chapter.

¹⁰⁶ Further discussion of the poem's content can be found in chapter five.

This success is further reinforced by the 1662 publication of the complete work of Jan Vos in which another poem on van Aelst appears.¹⁰⁷ The poem appears in the context of a series of poems on some of the paintings in the collection of the wealthy Amsterdam cloth merchant Jan Jacobsz Hinlopen. This poem by Vos, much like de Bie's poem on van Aelst, is then reprinted in Arnold Houbraken's life of van Aelst.¹⁰⁸ In Vos's book the poem appears among poems he composed on other paintings in Hinlopen's collection by artists such as Rembrandt, Gerbrandt van den Eeckhout, Jan Lievens and Peter Paul Rubens. Not only is the company illustrious, but the collection is also very significant. Moreover, this is the second laudatory poem to appear on van Aelst within two year's time. These details suggest that van Aelst's finely wrought paintings were finding their way into eminent Amsterdam collections.

The success intimated by the two poems is reflected in the next document regarding van Aelst, which does not appear until 1667 and which reveals the strength of the Medici connections that he made during his stay in Florence. In 1667, Cosimo III de' Medici embarked on the first of two European tours. These trips were designed to help heal the seemingly irreparable rift that existed between Cosimo III and his wife as of 1661, Margaretha Louisa van Orleans.¹⁰⁹ Margaretha Louisa had hoped to marry her cousin, whom she genuinely loved, Karel van Lotharingen. When her father decided that

¹⁰⁷ Jan Vos, *Alle de gedichten* (Amsterdam: Jacob Lescaille, 1662). 566.

¹⁰⁸ See beginning of chapter. The content of the poem is discussed in chapter five.

¹⁰⁹ The primary source for this trip abroad is: G. J. Hoogewerff, *De Twee reizen van Cosimo de' Medici Prins van Toscane door de Nederlanden (1667-1669)* (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1919). Additionally, for the correspondence maintained with merchants and other figures back in Italy during the journey see: Serenella Rolfi, "Il difetto di lontananza. Appunti sui viaggi di Cosimo III de' Medici nel Nord Europa," *Richerche di Storia dell'arte* 54 (1994).

she was instead to marry Cosimo III she was openly distressed, but consented. However, when Cosimo's lack of understanding and strict religious beliefs became too much for her, their marriage became untenable. In hopes of salvaging the marriage and ensuring the continuation of the Medici line, Cosimo's father, duke Ferdinando II sent Cosimo away. This time abroad proved revelatory for the Prince, and one of the most significant results of this travel for our purposes, was his discovery of his deep interest in Netherlandish art.¹¹⁰ His first journey began in October of 1668 and took him through Germany and ultimately to the Netherlands where he remained from December of 1667 through January of 1668. During the course of these travels, a journal was kept by Cosimo's secretary and recorded his activities and observations.¹¹¹ These fascinating journals are the source of our next two appearances of Willem van Aelst.

The first journal entry for consideration dates to Wednesday December 28, 1667 and the text of the entry reads as follows:

After listening to mass, his Highness went with his customary accompaniment and went to see a storehouse that was seventy feet long and three stories high, stuffed with completed woodwork and prepared for sale, likewise there were weapons of every sort, beds, tables, chests and other furniture of every conceivable sort, there a purchaser would have no need that could not be satisfied. From this location things were transferred to the "Rasphuis" which is a public house, where the condemned and the criminals of a certain sort of wrongdoer remain locked up; Thereafter he paid a visit to the collector Wttenbogaert, who holds all of the money of the city;

¹¹⁰ Hoogewerff, *Reizen*. VI-XVII In his introductory essay, Hoogewerff discusses the family drama behind Cosimo's departure north and sketches a compelling portrait of the salubrious effect that the travel had on the young Cosimo. For our purposes, we will only concern ourselves with the first of his two journeys.

¹¹¹ Hoogewerff, *Reizen*. Hoogewerff reproduces these journals both in the original Italian and in an abbreviated Dutch translation.

there because of his particular genius he delighted us with the course of 40 years of collecting in the genre of minerals, having led all over ships to Italy and other parts of the world, and had formed a curious cabinet, decorated with very good paintings. Because it was time for dinner, His Highness returned to his home, and that day he saw some paintings four of which were by the best in the country, among which was that Wan Aelst [Willem van Aelst], who painted so much for Signor Cardinale Giovan Carlo in Italy, and a woman who was his pupil, who in the genre of flower painting may have been superior to him. Other different artists came and brought various curiosities, looking at these things consumed the rest of the day.¹¹²

The entry is revealing on a number of levels and effectively communicates the sort of amusements available to a dignitary such as Cosimo III de' Medici while abroad. Indeed, consideration of the full entry reveals that many individuals not only worked to see that he was suitably occupied but also worked to curry his favor. Notably, Johan Blaeu, the eminent Amsterdam printer appears further down in this entry and also elsewhere. He clearly viewed the visit of the young prince as an opportunity and pursued it accordingly.

The mention of Willem van Aelst is notable for a number of reasons. Firstly, we must consider the manner in which he interacts with the Prince. The journal entry specifically notes that van Aelst's picture was among a group of paintings that had been sent for consideration. Van Aelst did not come himself, as the other unnamed artists and

¹¹² Hoogewerff, *Reizen*. 63-66. This text is only a portion of what is actually a very long and fascinating journal entry. The Italian text reads as follows: *Alle 17 udita la messa esci fuori colla solita accompagnatura et ando a vedere uno stanzone luongo 70 passi a tre piani, ripieno tutto di lavori di legno finite et aggiustati per vendere, come sarebbe arma d'ogni sorte, letti, tavole, cassette et altri mobile all' uso del paese adatti, dove I compratori possono del loro bisogno soddisfarsi. Di questo luogo si transferi al "Rasphus," che è una casa del pubblico, dove stanno rinchiusi i discoli e condannata una certa sorti di malfattori e segare e battere il verzino; successivamente fu alla casa del ricevitore Wytemboghert, che tiene tutto il denara della città; questo per suo genio particolare s' è diletato nel corso di 40 anni di raccogliere in genere di nicchi e di minerali quanto anno mai condotto tutte le navi dell' Italia et alter parti del mondo, onde ha formato un curiosissimo gabbinetto, ornato di quadric assai buoni.*

artisans who are mentioned below the discussion of van Aelst. Nor, moreover, did Cosimo come to van Aelst's studio as he did for other artists such as Rembrandt. It is especially interesting, however, that when van Aelst's name is mentioned in the entry he is known not only as one of the best artists in the country but also as the artist who executed so many paintings for Cardinal Giovan Carlo de Medici. This association is highly significant and is indicative of the true importance and value of his work for the Medici. The other fascinating piece of information that is conveyed by the diary entry is regarding the female painter's work which was seen with van Aelst's. She is referred to as his student. However, the sole female student that van Aelst was known to have had was Rachel Ruysch, who not only did not become his student until approximately 1679, but who would have been only three years old at the time of Cosimo's visit.¹¹³ It has been suggested that Maria van Oosterwijk is the female to which the entry refers.¹¹⁴ This suggestion is entirely plausible given her age and also her noted proficiency at flower painting (she was born in 1630). She is not documented in Amsterdam however until 1675, at which time she is living in a house across from the studio of Willem van Aelst.¹¹⁵ The sole problem with the suggestion that Maria van Oosterwijk is the pupil of van Aelst is that she is described in Houbraken as the pupil of Jan Davidsz. De Heem, indeed, her work bears his influence.¹¹⁶ It is possible, however, that at this point in her

¹¹³ Jan van Gool, *De Nieuwe Schouburg der Nederlandtsche Konstschilders en Schilderessen*, 2 vols. (The Hague: 1750-51). Vol. I, 211. In her dissertation on Rachel Ruysch, Marianne Berardi confirms this fact. Marianne Berardi, "Science into Art: Rachel Ruysch's Early Development as a Still-Life Painter" (University of Pittsburgh, 1998). 143.

¹¹⁴ Hoogewerff, *Reizen*. 63.

¹¹⁵ Willigen and Meijer, *Dictionary*. 154. Bredius, "Oosterwijk." 180-181.

¹¹⁶ Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol.II, 169.

career van Oosterwijk was working as a journeywoman in van Aelst's studio until she had established herself more firmly in the Amsterdam market. Regardless of the accuracy of the diary entry however, it is in fact true that there was an apparent connection between the two artists. This relationship is explored by Houbraken in his biography of van Oosterwijk, however van Aelst does not appear to have been her formal teacher.¹¹⁷

The second mention of van Aelst in Cosimo III's travel diary appears approximately a week later on January 4, 1668.

On this morning after Mass, His Highness went to the printing establishment of Johan Blaeu where he passed the time until noon in seeing much diversity of work and a great number of workers, who printed an epigram in praise of His Highness brought with great royal ceremony, we followed this form in all places, where we went to see some curiosity. After dining we remained to see different works, among which were some paintings by Vanaelst [van Aelst]...[following an extensive account of a sumptuous meal]...His Highness returned to the home of the deaf painter and then to the home of Roys (Ruysch), professor of anatomy, to see various dissections and other rarities of a similar nature, among which was a body of a boy that was very well preserved, who appeared to have died. He then retired at the customary hour, sending someone many times to quietly see how the above mentioned parties were progressing.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ This "relationship" will be discussed below.

¹¹⁸ Hoogewerff, *Reizen*. 79-81. The Italian text of the entry is as follows: *Mercoledì 4 andò questa mattina S.A. doppo la messa alla stamperia del Blaeu, dove consumò il tempo fino a mezzo giorno in vedere tanta diversità di lavori e gran numero di lavoranti, da' quail essendo stampato un epigramma in lode di S.A. furono di buona mancia regalati, conforme seguiva in tutti luoghi, dove andava a vedere qualche curiosità. Doppo desinare si trattenne vedendo diversi opere, tra le quail alcuni quadric di Vanaelst...S.A. alle 22 ritornò alla casa del pitor sordo e doppo a quella del Roys, professore di anatomia, a vedere diverse sezione et alter curiosità di somiglianti natura, tra le quail un cadavero di un fanicullo così ben conservato, che ancora spirante appariva. La sera all'ora consueto si ritirò, mandato più volte tacitamente a vedere ciò che facevano e come se la passavano i convitati sopradetti.*

This journal entry reveals that approximately a week after seeing paintings by van Aelst and, we assume, Maria van Oosterwijk, Cosimo again looked at van Aelst's paintings. It is unclear precisely how this procedure worked, that is, whether Cosimo contacted van Aelst and requested that paintings be sent over, or whether van Aelst sent over paintings on "spec" as it were. Regardless of precisely how the interaction occurred, it is apparent, once again, that van Aelst was a painter not only recognized but also welcome at Cosimo's temporary lodging. It should also be noted that the printworks of Johan Blaeu, where Cosimo spent the morning, were located on the Bloemgracht, where van Aelst's rented rooms could also have been found.¹¹⁹ The entry does not describe a visit to van Aelst's studio, but certainly the proximity would have made one possible.

This entry is also fascinating because it includes specific mention of Frederik Ruysch, the respected Leiden physician whose anatomical experiments were well known. Some of his specimens, examples of which Cosimo saw during his visit, still survive today.¹²⁰ Although it is coincidental that Cosimo should have looked at van Aelst's paintings on the same day that he went to Ruysch's cabinet, it does suggest the very real connection that did exist between Ruysch and van Aelst. Van Aelst was later to become the teacher of Frederik Ruysch's daughter, the celebrated Rachel Ruysch, as noted above. In addition, Otto Marseus van Schrieck, by this time living on his farm outside Amsterdam, circulated in the same group of cognoscenti that Ruysch did, and was known

¹¹⁹ See above for discussion of the Bloemgracht.

¹²⁰ Kooijmans, *Doodskunstenaar*. Kooijmans is the most recent source on Ruysch and discusses Cosimo's visit and his fascination with the preserved body of the young boy. 76. In addition, Kooijmans reproduces renderings and photographs of some of Ruysch's specimens (which he sold to Peter the Great in 1717 for 30,000 florins). Kooijmans, *Doodskunstenaar*. 448.

to have passed his biological observations on to Jan Swammerdam. When Otto Marseus van Schrieck died, Ruysch purchased items from his estate including some paintings and three boxes of butterfly wings.¹²¹ Otto Marseus van Schrieck's knowledge of Ruysch insures that at the very least van Aelst and Frederik Ruysch were conscious of one another's activities, regardless of whether or not they actually knew one another.

Unfortunately, we do not know which van Aelst paintings were shown and presumably purchased by Cosimo III. None of the paintings in the collections of the Palazzo Pitti or in the Uffizi appear to have been done outside of the period in which van Aelst was actually in Florence. We are left, therefore, to consider which known paintings executed slightly before or at the time of Cosimo's visit might have been considered suitable for presentation to the Medici Prince. The 1667 hunt piece in Brussels at the Koninklijk Museum voor Schoene Kunst is exactly the sort of painting that would have appealed to a young Medici Prince traveling abroad and used to the monumental still lifes van Aelst painted for his family in the early to mid 1650's (figure 17). It is generous in scale, fine in execution, and depicts the elements of the courtly pastime of hunting. Much like the grand still life discussed above (Figure 15) this painting contains the appropriate accoutrements for a hunt, including a gun remarkably similar to the one depicted in the earlier painting. Guns were actually not consistently or even frequently depicted by van Aelst in his hunt pieces, in fact there are only six still lifes in which he includes a firearm. It is possible that this familiar inclusion was deliberate on van Aelst's part, however it is

¹²¹ Kooijmans, *Doodskunstenaar*. 161.

difficult to say with certainty because we do not know whether he painted this work with Cosimo III in mind.

Heaped up on the marble tabletop, which is covered in a velvet cloth, are a pheasant and a partridge, a game bag and hunting horn, a gun and a brace of small songbirds that dangles off of the front edge of the table. Familiar motifs designed to demonstrate van Aelst's skill as a painter of differing textures are spread throughout the painting. For instance, the manner in which both larger birds are displayed, with softer, downy breast feathers arrayed next to the smoother, harder wing feathers; the juxtaposition of the metal of the gun barrel with the feathers surrounding it or the contrast of the worn, tan leather of the underside of the hunting bag's strap with the velvet outer layer. The composition does not have a lot of height to it, in fact it is oddly square in format, suggesting that at one point the painting may have been cut down. The provenance of the painting is also not helpful in this regard as its earliest known owner dates to 1890, when it was acquired by the Vicomte Bernard du Bus de Gisignies.¹²² Whether this painting was painted for or presented to Cosimo de Medici remains a mystery. What is apparent, however, is that the young prince, who would have been between the ages of nine and fourteen during van Aelst's time in Italy, developed, at very least, an interest in Willem's work, that manifested itself in the warm reception of his paintings upon his winter visit to Amsterdam.

¹²² Henri Pauwels, ed., *Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique département d'art ancien catalogue inventaire de la peinture ancienne* (Brussels: Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, 1984).1.

The next document relating to van Aelst occurs a little less than a year after his last mention in Cosimo's travel diary. Dating to December 14, 1668, this document is found in the records of the Amsterdam Notary, Jacobus Buijtewech:

14 Dec. 1668 the respectable Willem van Aelst, painter, gave power of attorney to Joost Donsdorp in order to follow up his business against all of his debtors.¹²³

Although not a terribly lengthy mention of van Aelst, this document is nevertheless significant. In the text, Willem van Aelst is not only referred to by his profession as a painter, but he is also described as *eersame* or honorable.¹²⁴ This adjective, although it is most likely standard notarial language, nevertheless implies a certain degree of standing and, quite literally respectability. More interesting is the fact that van Aelst had enough debtors that he felt it worthwhile to appoint someone, in this case Joost Donsdorp, to follow up and presumably handle the collection of the debts owed him. It is a sign, moreover, that he was probably in need of funds because the incident implies a certain urgency to receive payment on the part of van Aelst. It is interesting to speculate whether the debts may have been for paintings that were not fully paid for. Regardless of the grounds for the debts, their existence implies a degree of success on behalf of Willem van

¹²³ Records of Amsterdam Notary Jacobus Buijtewech, SAA 5075, NAA 3924, folio 34. The Dutch text is as follows: *14 December 1668 geeft d'eersame Willem van Aelst, Constschilder, procuratie aan Joost Donsdorp om zijne zaken ter vervolgen tegen al zijne debiteuren.*

¹²⁴ Modern spelling of this word is *eerzaam* and it can be translated as respectable, virtuous, decent, honest and worthy.

Aelst. Indeed, records dating to 1666 and 1668 document Willem van Aelst paintings valued at 300 and 150 guilders, respectable sums indeed.¹²⁵

Some three and a half years later a document emerges that not only informs us where van Aelst is living, but gives us further insight into his financial affairs.

12 March, 1672. Mr. Guiljelmo van Aelst, painter, is living in the home of Mr. Wolphert Vlieck, and is known to owe him [Vlieck] *f*550.-, *f*500.- of which is for room and board for a year... he shall pay on August 1, 1672.¹²⁶

This document suggests that van Aelst, although he was owed money, may actually have been having some financial difficulties. At this point he is still renting rooms, and in fact owes money for them. It is likely that the urgency to receive payment noted in relation to the December 1668 text was indeed indicative of a shortage of funds. For this reason van Aelst clearly was struggling to pay his debts.

This text is also the first official Dutch document to refer to van Aelst as *Guillhelmo*, the Italian version of his first name that he adopted as his official signature in 1658. From that point forward, van Aelst, who fastidiously signed and dated his pictures used an elaborate calligraphic signature with the first name *Guillhelmo* instead of his

¹²⁵ Bredius, "Archiefsprokkelingen." 266, 267. Bredius cites the 18 December 1666 inventory of Benningh Wyma which contained a "blompot" by van Aelst valued at *f*300.- (Amsterdam Notary Gilles Borsselaer, SAA 5075, NAA 1474) Also cited is the 27 January 1668 case regarding the selling of a Willem van Aelst "bloempot" which sold for *f*150.- Amsterdam Notary Jacobus Hellerus, SAA 5075, NAA 2494, folio 101.

¹²⁶ Amsterdam Notary Renier Duée, SAA 5075, NAA 2471, p. 30. Bredius, "Archiefsprokkelingen." 267. The Dutch text is as follows: *12 Maart 1672. Sr. Guiljelmo van Aelst, Kunstschilder, wondende tenhuysse van Sr. Wolphert Vlieck, bekend aan dezen f550.- schuldig te zijn, f500.- over één jaar kostgeld en kamerhuur... hij zaal 1 Augustus 1672 betalen.*

given name Willem. The fact that this Italian name appears in such official documentation attests to the awareness and significance of his assumed name.¹²⁷

Just two months later, in May 1672, a most remarkable incident occurs that suggests that, despite financial complications, van Aelst's reputation as a painter and an authority on Italian subjects has remained intact. The dispute at the heart of this incident is between Hendrik van Fromantiou, still life painter and recently appointed (1670) court painter to the Great Elector in Berlin, and the well known Amsterdam art dealer Gerrit Uylenburgh.¹²⁸ In 1671 Gerrit Uylenburgh offered thirteen Italian pictures to the Great Elector in Berlin, who, as noted above, had appointed Hendrik de Fromantiou as his court painter two years prior. The Elector agreed to purchase the paintings but only on the condition that, should they not be deemed acceptable, the paintings could be returned to Uylenburgh.¹²⁹ Upon viewing the pictures when they were unpacked in Berlin, Fromantiou is said to have declared that the paintings were *vodden*, literally junk or rubbish.¹³⁰ Despite Uylenburgh's protestations, Fromantiou returned to Amsterdam in the spring of 1672 in order to lodge his formal complaint. Uylenburgh fought back by having a number of arbiters suggest before an Amsterdam Magistrate that although the works were not all of the highest quality, they all had a rightful place in a cabinet of Italian paintings. These arbiters included Dirck Santvoort, Jan Blom, Wallerant Vaillant, Anthony de Grebber, Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, and a number of other notable

¹²⁷ The significance of this adopted name will be discussed below in chapter five.

¹²⁸ The primary document on this incident and the source for my discussion is: Bredius, "Italiaansche."

¹²⁹ Bredius, "Italiaansche." 41.

¹³⁰ Bredius, "Italiaansche." 41.

painters.¹³¹ Fromantiou countered by assembling his own group of painters on May 12, 1672 to agree that the works were indeed *vodden*. These painters were: Willem van Aelst, Jan André Lievens, Adam Pijnacker, Willem Kalf, Otto Marseus van Schrieck, Mattheus van Pellecum, Jan Wijnants, Melchior de Hondecoeter, Bartholomeus Appelman, Hendrick van Someren, Barent Graat, Roelandt Roghman, Daniel Wolfraedt, Jacob Vennecool, Lambert Doomer, Gerard Lairesse and Jan Wils.¹³² Uylenburgh responded two days later with a second group of his own experts, however the decision to reject the works had been made and all but a single canvas by Ribera were returned by the Great Elector.¹³³ The affair continued on in a series of letters and official documents as Uylenburgh continued to deny the condemnation of his paintings.¹³⁴ For our purposes it is not necessary to explain the intricacies of this complicated affair. The broad details outlined above provide a context for the presence of van Aelst's name on the document condemning the paintings. The artists chosen by Fromantiou, while not all are well known today, are noteworthy because seven out of the seventeen names were artists who had traveled abroad, although not all to Italy. It is probable that some of their authority to judge the disputed Italian works was believed to originate from this experience. The success and proficiency of the undersigned artists was also most likely a factor in their selection. It is fascinating to consider van Aelst in the company of this group. We know that he was acquainted with Otto Marseus van Schrieck and likely also Willem Kalf from

¹³¹ Bredius, "Italiaansche." 42.

¹³² Bredius, "Italiaansche." 42. SAA 5075, NAA 4074 ff. 367r.-367v.

¹³³ Ironically enough, the only "Italian" picture deemed worthy of retaining was actually by a Spaniard.

¹³⁴ Bredius, "Italiaansche." See 42-46 for rest of story.

his time abroad, however it is intriguing to consider what van Aelst might have had to say to Melchior de Hondecoeter or even the painter turned theorist Gerard de Lairese who would later so categorically condemn still life painting in his *Groot Schilderboek*.¹³⁵ The insight this document gives into the artistic community in which van Aelst circulated is invaluable. Sadly, his signature is the only information that exists regarding his involvement in this incident. However what the presence of his name implies is that he was viewed as a respected, experienced artist whose opinions on paintings were considered sound and trustworthy.

In August of 1672, just three months after the testimony on the Italian paintings another document regarding van Aelst appears. In this document we learn the location of the home in which he is renting and for how long he has been there.

7 August, 1672. Mr. Willem van Aelst, approximately 46 years old, reported that he has lived for the past three years with Wolphert Vlieck in a house on the Rockin (in which Vlieck continually had troubles with water in the cellar).¹³⁶

From this document we learn that since 1669 van Aelst had been living with Wolphert Vlieck in a house on the Rokin, one of the central streets in the very heart of the city close by the new Amsterdam town hall and the stock exchange. We also learn that van Aelst's age at the time of the record was approximately 46, which is consistent with his

¹³⁵ Gerard de Lairese, *A Treatise on Painting, in all its branches; accompanied by seventy engraved plates, and exemplified by remarks on the paintings of the best masters*, trans. William Marshall Craig (London: E. Ormer, 1817). See especially p. 179 of this translation.

¹³⁶ Bredius, "Archiefsprokkelingen." 267, taken from the records of the Amsterdam Notary Dirk van der Groe, SAA 5075, NAA 4075, folio 75 r & v. The Dutch text is as follows: *7 Augustus 1672. Sr. Willem van Aelst, out omtrent 46 jaaren, vertelt dat hij nu 3 jaaren gewoond heft bij Wolphert Vlieck in een huijs op he Rockin (waar Vlieck steeds overlast had van water in den kelder.)*

birth date, noted above. Just under three months later another document appears, also involving Wolphert Vlieck.

31 October, 1672. Mr. Wolphert Vlieck is known to have collected f693:18:- from Mr. Willem van Aelst and therefore has no more claim on him. "He shall on the coming Monday 7 November, on the receipt of his costs allow van Aelst to continue living there."¹³⁷

From this document we can conclude that van Aelst successfully paid off the debts he owed to Vlieck and for the time being continued to live in his house. We will see below that van Aelst eventually finds a new place to live in a grander neighborhood than the one in which he lives with Vlieck.

A final document regarding van Aelst's financial situation is also registered on the same day as the one just discussed: 31 October, 1672. In this case, the person to whom van Aelst owes money is no longer Wolphert Vlieck, but another individual. The document is richer than the others discussed above because it reveals van Aelst using paintings to cover his debts.

31 October 1672 there appeared Mr. Willem van Aelst, painter, who is known to be quite in debt to Mr. Thomas Prent, wine merchant, for a sum of 400 carolus guildens in the matter of loaned coins – and that in addition to the two paintings that were painted by the aforementioned van Aelst and sold by him to Prent, one depicting a Pickled herring, a crab, a shell, a mother of pearl horn and a few other rarities; the other a green velvet bag with sparrows and so forth, which two works he undertook to supply to the aforementioned Prent with first opportunity. Which 400 carolus guildens he is responsible for paying at first opportunity, therefore

¹³⁷ Bredius, "Archiefsprokkelingen." 267, taken from the records of the Amsterdam Notary Nicolaes Hemminck, SAA 5075, NAA 4296, folio 403. The Dutch text is as follows: *31 October 1672. Sr. Wolfert Vlieck bekent van Sr. Willem van Aelst f693:18:- ontvangen te hebben wegens verteerd kostgeld en dus niets meer op hem te hebben pretendeeren. Sullende hy van Aelst tot toecomende Maendagh 7 November op syn compt. 's coste en laste mogen blijven wonen.*

for further security... all of his moveable goods will be transferred.¹³⁸

From a notation in the margin it is clear that on the 12th of June 1676, Willem van Aelst paid off his debt to Prent. This document, with its fairly specific descriptions of paintings is especially interesting. It seems that van Aelst was in considerable difficulty with money, to the extent that his household goods were claimed, and he was not able to pay off his debt until 1676, some four years after the date of the document. It is unclear whether the household items were actually taken, or whether van Aelst was allowed to keep them. It is also unclear whether the loan was paid off all at once in 1676 or in small increments. For our purposes, it is the descriptions of the paintings that are most intriguing.

While there are no paintings that exactly match the descriptions of those in the text as well as date to the appropriate year, there are two very close images. The painting with the pickled herring, what can be termed a breakfast piece, bears much in common with the 1672 painting in the Staatliche Kunstsammlung in Schwerin (Figure 18).

Although the shell is not present, the herring, mother of pearl horn (the nautilus shell) and the crab certainly are and the 1672 date suggests that this is likely the painting van Aelst painted for Prent. The second work described, the hunt piece with green velvet bag is

¹³⁸ Bredius, "Archiefsprokkelingen." 267, records of Amsterdam Notary Nicolaes Hemminck, SAA 5075, NAA 4296, folio 401 r & v. The Dutch Text is as follows: *31 October 1672 compareerde... Sr. Willem van Aelst, constschilder, en bekende wel en deughdelyck schuldig te wesen aen Sr. Thomas Prent, Wynvercooper, en somme van 400 carolus guldens ter saecke van geleende penninghen- ende dat boven de twee stucx schilderijen, die by hem comparant selfs werden geschildert, en aen hem Prent vercoft, bestaende in een Pekelharingh, Krabbe, een Schroef, een paerlmoer horn en nogh eenige andere Rarichheden; 't ander een groene fluwele Tas met een Rist vogeltjes en soo voorts, welke twee stucx... hy aenneemt aen de voorsz Prent te leveren mette eerste gelegenthey, daervoor tot naerder verseeckeringe... alle syne roerende goederen transporteerende*

likely the 1671 painting that is now in the collection of the Mauritshuis in The Hague (Figure 19). The painting dates to one year earlier, and the described birds, *Rist vogeltjes* (birds I identified with the *rijstvogel*, or Java sparrow) are instead replaced by a partridge and an unidentifiable bird in the background, however the green velvet bag is present. Interestingly, the majority of velvet hunting bags that van Aelst depicts are blue. Green bags are less common in his work and therefore the presence of one in a painting so close to the date of the described work should not be taken as simply coincidental. Both of these paintings exemplify the sorts of work that van Aelst was producing at this point in his career. The larger, grander paintings of his earlier career had, for the most part ceased by this point, and the paintings he was creating were generally smaller in scale and tended to repeat certain compositional conventions. Both works typify a codification of style and type that appears to have been designed to appeal to a wealthy clientele.

In 1674, only two years after his financial difficulties with Thomas Prent were recorded, it seems that van Aelst's debts should have been of little problem to him. In this year, he was assessed for the 200th penny tax (*200e penning*), which was a wealth tax. It is recorded that his payment amounted to *f*20.--.¹³⁹ The total value of van Aelst's possessions in 1674 was therefore approximately *f*4000.--.¹⁴⁰ This is truly a remarkable sum of money, particularly in light of the fact that around 1650 four-fifths of the population of Holland earned less than *f*600 per year, and of that group, the average

¹³⁹ Bredius, "Archiefsprokkelingen." 267.

¹⁴⁰ For a thorough explanation of the tax system at the time, and how payments were calculated, an invaluable source is Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, failure and perserverance of the Dutch economy, 1500-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). On the 200th penny tax in particular see pages 107-108.

family income was about *f*363 per year.¹⁴¹ A valuation of *f*4000 therefore indicates that van Aelst was not only comfortable, he was rather wealthy.

Shortly thereafter, sometime after 1675, the painter Ernst Stuken came to study with van Aelst.¹⁴² The precise date is unknown, however Houbraken notes that Stuken arrived in Amsterdam in 1675, hoping to study portraiture. Accordingly, he worked for a very short time for Jan Ovens, but it was found that his style was better suited to flower painting, at which point he was sent to study with van Aelst. According to Houbraken, after working in van Aelst's studio for an unspecified time, he then went to study with Abraham Mignon.¹⁴³ Ernst Stuken's work bears much in common with the work of his teacher van Aelst, yet a comparison between two of their flower paintings reveals a number of distinct differences (Figures 20 & 21). Compositionally, Stuken organizes his bouquet along a diagonal, much like van Aelst, although his is much less pronounced and emphatic, and consequently loses some of the visual force of the device. Like van Aelst, Stuken includes orange marigolds at the center of his composition to add visual interest and color. The foliage is a particular area of contrast. For van Aelst, large, muscular leaves are a fundamental structural element, whereas in Stuken's painting the foliage is more secondary. In general, van Aelst's work has a much more convincing sense of depth and three-dimensionality than Stuken's. This is apparent in a basic comparison between the pocket watches in both paintings. Stuken's watch, particularly in terms of the reflections in the open cover, is handled somewhat clumsily with awkward

¹⁴¹ Vries and Woude, *First*. 565-567.

¹⁴² Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol. III, 372

¹⁴³ Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol. III, 372.

foreshortening, and the blue ribbon is flat and lacks volume. In van Aelst's work the rendering of the open crystal case is fully convincing and the ribbon hangs in crisp, weighty folds. Despite his training, Stuvven is ultimately a lesser artist than his master.

Perhaps in accordance with the wealth noted in his 1674 tax assessment, Willem van Aelst is documented for the first time living along the Nieuwe Keizersgracht in 1676. This is the grand new section of canal that was constructed in response to the growing population and demand for large, new homes.¹⁴⁴ Oddly enough, van Aelst appears to have lived directly across the canal from the flower painter, Maria van Oosterwijk. This proximity was described by Houbraken in his life of Maria van Oosterwijk as he recounts the amusing tale of van Aelst's unsuccessful attempts to court the pious and talented female painter.¹⁴⁵ In this tale Maria van Oosterwijk swears that she will consider van Aelst's advances should he work at his painting every day for a year, however should he not work each day, she would then be free of any obligations to him. Van Oosterwijk informs van Aelst that she can verify his diligence because she can see his studio from hers. Accordingly, van Oosterwijk makes a chalk mark on her window frame for each day that van Aelst was not at work in his studio. At the end of the year, knowing that the number of chalk marks were too many to explain away, van Aelst does not even attempt to approach van Oosterwijk.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ The Nieuwe Keizersgracht is a short stretch of the Keizersgracht to the east of the Amstel in the south-east of the city. It was part of the final expansion and completion of the ring canals and was begun in the 1660's. We can therefore determine with some precision where van Aelst lived by 1676. Spies et al., *Canals*. 43.

¹⁴⁵ Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol. II, 168-171.

¹⁴⁶ Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol. II, 170-171.

Amusing though this tale is, and appropriate for Houbraken's picture of van Aelst as a lazy and lascivious character, it is not the subject of the series of notarial documents which we shall now consider. On the 29th of July 1676 (thus, one month after he had paid off his debt to Thomas Prent) the Amsterdam Notary C. Laurentius documents a peculiar set of events.

29 July 1676. It is being explained at the request of Miss. Maria van Oosterwijk who lives on the New Keizersgracht in this city (Amsterdam) " That last Tuesday, the 22nd of this month, she saw the deputy bailiff Philips Engelbrecht entering into the home of Willem van Aelst, and saw him leaving there again. Furthermore, that Grietge, the maidservant of the aforementioned van Aelst was jeering very loudly at bailiff Engelbrecht and wagged her finger after him, and on other days the deponent and her maidservant Geertruyt were leaning over the door and the previous witness (Neeltje Ians) by order of the deponent had to go to the house of the above mentioned van Aelst in order to get some rain clothes for the deponent and to bring some others back as well. The maidservant of van Aelst said: "I don't want to give it to you, the beasts, the pigs that are hanging over their door over there (indicating the deponent (Oosterwijk) and her maidservant) they can come and get it themselves, the pigs that they are."¹⁴⁷

Further documents continue on in this vein, condemning the housemaid of van Aelst. It is never made clear where the vitriol that Grietge spouts came from and why it was directed

¹⁴⁷ Bredius, "Oosterwijk." 180. From the records of the Amsterdam notary, Philippus Laurentius, SAA 5075, NAA 3887, pp. 184-185. The Dutch text reads as follows: *29 Juli 1676 Eenige personen verklaren ten verzoeke van Juffrow Maria van Oosterwijk, woonende op de Nieuwe Keizersgracht binnen dezer stede, dat sy verleden Dinsdagh, sijnde den 22en dezer, gesien hebben, dat den Substituytschout Philips Engelbrecht gegaen is in 't huys van Willem van Aelst, ende hem wederom daeruyt hebben sien comen. Voorts dat Grietge, de dienstmaecht van de voorsz van Aelst den schout Engelbrecht seer uytlaecht en met vingeren na wees, en des anderen daechs de requirante en haer dienstmaecht Geertruyt over de deur leggende, en zy laetste getuijge (Neeltje Ians) door ordre van haer requirante ten huijse van de gemelte van Aelst was gegaen om een regenkleet van haer requirante te haelen en ander wederom te brengen, seijde de dienstmaecht van van Aelst: ick wil 't U niet geven, de beesten, de schotvarckens die daer over de deur leggen (denoterende daermede de requirante en hare dienstmaecht) die mogen 't selven comen halen, die schotbeesten als sy sijn.*

at van Oosterwijk and her servant. Indeed, van Aelst himself is oddly silent on the matter and his testimony never appears. A further document gives additional detail to the story.

1676 (undated) To the noble official gentlemen of this city of Amsterdam. Testimony is given regarding Maria van Oosterwijk, young lady, burgher of this city, as well as supplicant, who alone with her housemaid Grietge Pieters manages her household, and has never given anyone in the world reason for displeasure or has caused any offense, but that truly on the contrary the housemaid of Willem van Aelst, the painter living directly across from the supplicant, has tormented the supplicant and her aforementioned housemaid not only with foul, strident words, always treating them very offensively, insulting and scorning, such that they cannot peacefully lean over their door, sit on their their stoop or even use the public street, but, what is more, she has seen her assault her housemaid on the street and insult the supplicant's housemaid to her face, such that companions have been forced to fall over complaints [here follows the story noted in the above passage] I appeal humbly to the noble gentlemen that you should so quickly as you wish judge as you see fit.¹⁴⁸

This is the final document regarding this series of incidents. It clarifies the complicated matter and indicates that Maria van Oosterwijk, although known as a humble, god fearing woman, indeed was not afraid to defend herself. Once again, little to no information is provided regarding van Aelst's or his housemaid's perspective. It is tempting to speculate

¹⁴⁸ Bredius, "Oosterwijk." 181. The Dutch text from Bredius is as follows: *Aan de E.E. Heeren Schepenen deser stede Amsterdam. Geeft enz... te kennen Maria van Oosterwijk jongedochter, burgeresse alhier, of wel sy suppliant, die met haer diensmaecht Grietge Pieters alleen huys houdt, noyt aen iemant in de werelt eenige redder tot misnoegen ofte offensue heft gegeven, dat het echter en integendeel der dienstmaecht van Willem van Aelst, schilder woonende recht over de deur van de suppliant, gelust heft de suppliant en haer voorn, dienstmaecht niet alleen met vuyle scheltwoorden, geduurigh seer onfatsoenlijck te bejegenen, lasteren en hoonen sulcx dat sy met gerustheijt niet en kan over haer deur leggen, op de stoep sitten en 's Heeren straten gebruyken, maer, wat meet is, aher niet en heeft ontsien haer en haer dienstmaecht op straat aen te randen en der suppliantis dienstmaecht int aengesicht te quetsen, sulcx dat sy genootsaecht is geweest daer over klaghtigh te vallen... (volgt het verhaal van den Schout die door de meid in kwestie uitgelachen werd)... versoeckt de E.E. Heeren seer ootmoedigh dat Uw E.E. hierinne soodanige spoedige ordere believe te stellen als Uw E.E. sult oordeelen te behooren. 'T welck doende, enz.*

that the ire of van Aelst's housemaid Grietge is due to van Oosterwijk's rebuff of van Aelst's advances. However such a suggestion is untenable, for not only is Houbraken's story undated and unverifiable, it also does not mean that van Aelst would have shared his romantic humiliations with his housemaid nor does it mean that his housemaid would then so overtly and aggressively defend the pride of her employer. That van Aelst was willing to tolerate such an insolent servant for as long as it took for this incident to spiral out of control suggests either that he was not in a financial position to be discerning regarding his help, or that, given his own allegedly intemperate behavior, he found no fault in his housemaid's. The factual information that we can reliably glean from these events is restricted to the fact that we now know that van Aelst was living on the Nieuwe Keizersgracht, from at least July 1676 and most likely earlier, because his housing situation was already becoming unstable in October 1672 when Wolphert Vlieck, from whom he had been renting since 1669, reclaimed his debts from van Aelst. Perhaps the high taxes he was assessed with in 1674 were due to the value of his new home. From the above document we also learn that van Aelst lived across the street from Maria van Oosterwijk, suggesting that Houbraken's story may have been based on at least some grain of truth.

It is also around this time, the end of the 1670's (likely around 1679 or 1680) that Rachel Ruysch came to study with van Aelst, as noted above.¹⁴⁹ It is unknown precisely how long she stayed with van Aelst, although in his biography of Rachel Ruysch, Jan van

¹⁴⁹ Berardi, "Science". 146

Gool asserts that she remained with him for only “a few years.”¹⁵⁰ Her work, particularly her early paintings, was influenced by van Aelst’s style, but her more mature paintings also reflect the style of other artists, particularly Abraham Mignon. For instance, a comparison between her 1716 flower piece in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam and van Aelst’s 1663 flower piece in the Legion of Honor Museum, San Francisco reveals both van Aelst’s influence and Ruysch’s distinctive qualities (Figures 21 & 22). In terms of their similarities, it is clear that Ruysch’s sense of composition was profoundly influenced by van Aelst. She has adopted his signature diagonal composition as well as his use of the bloom hanging over the front edge of the table to accentuate the painting’s diagonal structure. The detailed style is also related to van Aelst’s, although his painting is somewhat more hard-edged than Ruysch’s. The use of stems and leaves to fill out the composition is also a great distinction between them. Van Aelst chooses larger, more sculptural plants and branches which undulate in slow, natural curves. Ruysch’s foliage has a more delicate, lace-like quality to it, and she frequently includes stems and branches that curve in a more pronounced and stylized way. The difference that this comparison makes most plain however, is the color palette. In general, van Aelst’s paintings are cooler in tone with highlights of deeper more saturated colors. Ruysch, on the other hand uses a warmer palette, with softer, more subdued tones. What this comparison makes plain, is that although Ruysch benefitted greatly from her study with van Aelst, her style developed into one wholly distinct from that of her original master. Although there is no

¹⁵⁰ Gool, *Nieuwe*. Vol. I, p. 211

documentation of it, study of existing paintings suggests that it is likely that Rachel's younger sister Anna was also a student with van Aelst.¹⁵¹

At the end of January, 1679, some three years after the incident with Maria van Oosterwijk, van Aelst marries his housemaid, Helena Niewenhuis. This appears to be a different woman from Grietje, who so abused van Oosterwijk. In the marriage document, the official record of the marriage was put down at January 31, 1679, however a note in the margin indicates that the couple actually got married on the 15th of January. In the document, van Aelst is described as living on the Keizersgracht, his parents are described as dead and his age is given as 52. His new wife, Helena Niewenhuis is described as coming from Wetter (in Germany) and she apparently presented evidence of her parent's consent. Eglon van der Neer, son of the landscape painter Aert van der Neer, and known for his finely painted genre scenes, was the witness at the marriage.¹⁵²

The couple had two children, one well before they were married on the 31st of January, and one shortly thereafter. On the 12th of May 1675 they baptized a son, Willem, in the Reformed Amstel Kerk, and on the 7th of May, 1679 they baptized a daughter Katrijna in the Reformed Nieuwe Zijds Kapel.¹⁵³ Both children were conceived out of wedlock, in fact the young boy was already a year old while the dispute was occurring between van Aelst's housemaid Grietje and Maria van Oosterwijk and her maid. From this information we can conclude that van Aelst must have had at least two servants at the

¹⁵¹ Fred Meijer and Edwin Buijsen, "Anna Ruysch's Rabbit's Teeth and Fringes," *The Hoogsteder Journal*, no. 4 (1998), 21.

¹⁵² SAA, DTB nr. 505, blz. 415.

¹⁵³ SAA, DTB bron 119, p. 75; DTB bron 67 p. 55.

time, Helena, who had clearly become a common law wife at this point, and Grietge, who we assume took over the duties abandoned by Helena when she became the mother of van Aelst's son. There is some indication that on February 19, 1677, a Willem van Aelst, living on the Keizersgracht, buried a child at the Lutherse Kerk.¹⁵⁴ This could only have been the young son, Willem, as the daughter Katrijna had not yet been born.

On the 22nd of May, 1683, Willem van Aelst himself was buried at the Nieuwe Zijds Kapel, over the nieuwe turf markt. In this entry his first name is spelled Wilhelmus, the German spelling of Willem, for which we can take his wife's German origins as explanation. He is also cited as living on the Princegracht, which, given that the last mention of his home on the Nieuwe Keizersgracht was four years prior on the occasion of his marriage, is not inconceivable.¹⁵⁵ This death date is also likely, because 1683 is the year of the last known painting for van Aelst.¹⁵⁶ The inventory for van Aelst, if it exists, has not yet been found. It was suggested by Houbraken that van Aelst's wife Helena returned to her native Wetter, and it is possible that some document exists there.¹⁵⁷

This humble burial concludes the life of the talented, ambitious and also flawed painter, Willem van Aelst. This chapter sought to establish all of the known details regarding his life, never before assembled in one document. It gives a picture of the painter we can detect and the painter that others perceived. Aside from discussions of his

¹⁵⁴ SAA, DTB nr. 1250, blz. 3.

¹⁵⁵ SAA, DTB 1069, blz. 61, fifth entry, filed under van Aalst. Houbraken states that van Aelst was living on the Prinsengracht when he died, although he erroneously places the death date at 1679. Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol. I, 229.

¹⁵⁶ Willigen and Meijer, *Dictionary*. 25. The painting is ex collection Hausmann.

¹⁵⁷ It is my hope to be able to eventually consult the archives in Wetter to verify whether she returned and if possible, what she brought with her.

paintings, Willem van Aelst has remained largely silent in this account. The subsequent chapters give us opportunity to study how he attempted to portray himself to the world, the persona he constructed using the vehicle of his paintings and his actions. We will also study how others valued his work, what they prized in his paintings, and how this caused him to shape his work to increase its appeal. Van Aelst is a complicated figure, and although these preceding pages have communicated the factual elements of his life as far as it is possible to reconstruct it, the most intriguing parts of him must still be considered.

Chapter Three: Study of Types and Characteristics Within van Aelst's Oeuvre

Detailed study of van Aelst's paintings has not been undertaken before, nor has a body of work been defined for him. Although not a catalogue raisonné, the following section analyzes images selected from van Aelst's oeuvre and describes the place of his work in the larger field of Dutch still life painting. The study will be divided by type, as it allows the stylistic, compositional and thematic development to be viewed most clearly. The subjects under consideration are the flower piece, the fruit piece, the hunt piece, the forest floor still life, the fish piece and the *pronk* still life. Each section will consider several representative paintings, while also referencing other examples, both by van Aelst and by others, from that class of still life. As will become clear, certain types of paintings, like his flower pieces do not move far beyond the prevailing styles of the day, however others, like his fish paintings, are unique and are innovations for the genre.

As became apparent throughout the preceding biography chapter, van Aelst's artistic development is notably linked to the events in his life. His early Delft work is characterized by a certain provincial quality, revealing the influence of his teacher and uncle as well as the more indirect influence of artists like Ambrosius Bosschaert and Balthasar van der Ast. The paintings attributable to his French period reveal a strong debt to his encounter with painters like Paul Liegois and Jean-Michel Picart. His work quickly took on a more refined and polished style, with the compositions becoming increasingly elaborate and losing the simplicity of design characteristic of his early work. His period in Italy heightened this refinement, and the paintings are characterized by more

ambitious, larger scale compositions, finer polish and inclusions of objects precious to his patrons. It was also in Italy where he executed his first hunt piece. His return to the Netherlands and move to Amsterdam in 1656 revealed the extent of the change to his paintings. In addition to a more standard output he also executed a number of works that were on par with the ambitious paintings he created for the Medici. After approximately ten years, these ambitious works were no longer to be seen in his oeuvre and his paintings assumed a more standardized countenance. The works fall into clearly defined categories that he elaborated and refined and his painting style became increasingly polished. His late work reveals an increase in the number of smaller paintings, more jewel-like and intimate works. This is heightened by a greater tendency to use very dark, almost black backgrounds juxtaposed with strong colors that define forms using a softer, more blended technique. The importance of van Aelst's biography to his stylistic development, therefore, is felt most acutely in the first fifteen years of his career. Once he settles in Amsterdam and fully develops his style he is remarkably consistent in his work.

Flower Painting

The earliest painting that is attributed to Willem van Aelst is a flower piece dating to 1643 (figure 23). For those familiar with the mature work of van Aelst this relatively small, modest painting appears to be the work of a different artist. Indeed, a comparison with one of his later flower pieces, a 1663 painting in the San Francisco Legion of Honor Museum, reveals that his oeuvre underwent a remarkable transformation (figure 21).

However, aside from illustrating a dramatic shift in style, such a simplistic comparison actually reveals very little. A careful examination of the San Francisco painting, which exemplifies his high-style Amsterdam period paintings, will help to clarify his technique and provide a point of comparison.

The San Francisco flower piece is a masterpiece of careful composition. The strong diagonal axis, an element found in the work of Jan Davidsz. de Heem around mid-century, dominates the painting and provides rhythm and flow to the composition. The flowers are organized with great care so that they fall along the lines of the diagonal axis or provide striking counterpoints to the prevailing orientation of the painting. For instance, the dominant diagonal line created between the red poppy in the upper right corner and the pink roses in the bottom left corner, is heightened by a secondary crossing diagonal created between the towering iris, the blasted parrot tulip and the red and white carnation. This secondary line, just slightly off of vertical balances the dominant diagonal axis and helps provide the composition with rhythm and interest. Even the rock crystal pocket watch, laying precariously along the edge of the table, echoes the upper right to lower left diagonal. This highly structured yet visually dynamic quality is one of the primary characteristics of van Aelst's high period flower paintings.

An earlier painting, like the 1652 flower piece in the Palazzo Pitti (figure 14) shows the very earliest developments of this heightened structure and movement towards strong diagonal compositions. In this work the upper right to lower left diagonal is clearly present, defined by the line that can be drawn from the narcissus flowers, down to the

branch of rose buds and leaves that hangs next to the vase. Coincidentally here too, the dominant iris also defines a secondary diagonal in this painting as it does in the San Francisco work. In general it is clear, though, that the strength of the diagonal structure in the San Francisco picture is more pronounced and developed.

A later work than the San Francisco painting, such as the 1678 flower piece in the Staatliches Museum in Schwerin (figure 24), reveals the variations van Aelst developed on the theme of the flower piece. In this painting, the dominant diagonal is still present, as defined by the scarlet poppy and its buds in the upper right corner. However, in this work, instead of a secondary diagonal that is of lesser importance in relation to the primary, van Aelst has included an equally significant diagonal that runs from upper left to lower right. This axis is defined by the white snowballs, pink rose with its attendant butterfly, and red and white carnation. The composition, therefore, becomes quite distinctly x-shaped, taking on an even greater vigor than his already dynamic 1663 painting.

Not only is the layout of the flowers within his floral paintings carefully constructed, but the flowers themselves also take on a highly structured, almost sculptural quality. Contrary both to the flatter, more decorative style that was to dominate in the work of Jan van Huysum at the turn of the century and to the earlier, less sculptural style of artists like Ambrosius Bosschaert, van Aelst's flowers and foliage assume a bold three-dimensionality. He achieves this effect through his lighting, with areas of strong highlight, juxtaposed with areas of deep shadow. Using the example of the San Francisco

picture once again, we can observe the same effect in the blasted parrot tulip. Its still vertical petals are strongly lit as is the inner heart of the flower. By contrast, the inside face of the petals is cast into shadow, as are the petals on the back side of the bloom. All of this is placed in front of a particularly dark passage in the bouquet, thus heightening the sense of contrast and form. This same three dimensionality in front of a dark background can be seen in both the iris and the scarlet poppy. The foliage, moreover, is especially sculptural in this painting with particularly notable passages in the area beneath the bloom of the poppy, and the leaves of the rose branch that dips beneath the edge of the marble tabletop where it is brightly lit and set off against the black background.

The example of the 1663 Mauritshuis flower piece, the counterpart to the San Francisco painting, is also relevant here (figure 25).¹ In this painting, there are notably fewer flowers than in its counterpart in San Francisco (Figure 21). The majority of the blooms are clustered in the center-to-lower-left portion of the composition. Rather than leaving a blank and empty composition in the upper right, van Aelst fills the painting with the bold, expressive leaves of the poppy whose scarlet bloom and spherical buds creates the upper most corner of the dominant diagonal. Particularly noticeable in this passage is van Aelst's tendency to depict his leaves with strongly highlighted edges. This

¹ The relationship between these two 1663 flower paintings was discussed at some length in Broos, *Great Dutch Paintings From America*. Here, Broos suggests that the San Francisco painting was the primary work, and the Mauritshuis painting, while clearly still a signature painting, was secondary. I tend to be less decided on this matter. The San Francisco painting is indeed the more elaborate of the two, however, the great skill in both paintings causes neither to be easily classed as secondary or a copy of some kind. This issue is discussed further in chapter four.

not only draws attention to the volume of the foliage, but it also emphasizes the elegant curving edges that van Aelst gives his leaves. This is particularly effective in the downward curving poppy leaf to the right of the butterfly. These thick, leathery leaves, which van Aelst paints with curling, rippled edges and a strongly twisting habit, are a hallmark of his work. Van Aelst's leaves, whether they belong to a poppy or a peach, are never simply background elements, they twist and turn and provide the necessary contrast and shape to make a successful composition. These expressive leaves are not only present in his flower paintings, but in his fruit pieces as well.

The vase that the Mauritshuis and San Francisco paintings both share is also a significant element.² The pairing of strongly sculptural auricular silver with such a robust and powerfully defined bouquet is surely no accident. Van Aelst clearly delights in the full, defined forms of the flowers, the foliage, the vase and even the rounded edge of the marble tabletop with its swirling pattern. These organic patterns echo one another in a harmonious blend of rich and substantial forms. Moreover the juxtaposition of van Aelst's sculptural flowers and foliage with a depiction of such a costly and artful vase is appropriate and telling, given the original inspiration for auricular silver designs. The ramifications of this comparison are manifold, ranging from a pure statement of artistic virtuosity to a subtle allusion to the creative powers of god.³

² This vase is also present, in a somewhat altered form, in the flower piece found in the Michaelis Collection in Cape Town, South Africa. See Chapter four section two for a discussion of the relationship of the Mauritshuis, San Francisco and Cape Town pictures. The Michaelis Collection picture can be found in: Hans Franssen, *Michaelis Collection, The Old Town House, Cape Town: Catalogue of the Collection of Paintings and Drawings* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1997).

³ These issues will be explored in much greater depth in chapter five.

The significance of the vase to van Aelst's production of flower paintings is not simply for its form, structure and allusions to artistic virtuosity. The vase in the San Francisco picture is accompanied not only by a valuable rock-crystal pocket watch, but also by a gold-fringed velvet cloth, all set atop a marble tabletop. The marble table is not unique to van Aelst by any means, but it is an element that only entered his pictorial vocabulary when he began producing some of his more mature pictures in France, such as the 1649 fruit piece in the Prinsenhof Museum in Delft (Figure 6). Its implications of luxury and wealth are apparent. The other objects, the vase, watch and cloth further this suggestion, and it is the consistent combination of these man-made elements with the genre of flower painting that helps to characterize van Aelst's work. This kind of combination is in no way unique. Jan Brueghel's 1618 still life with a garland of flowers and a golden *tazza* in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels (figure 26) is one notable example of this traditional combination. Less obviously luxurious, but valuable nonetheless, the shells surrounding the vase of flowers in Balthasar van der Ast's 1625-1630 painting in the Rijksmuseum (figure 27) are a clear continuation of the tradition. More contemporary with van Aelst, artists like Jan Davidsz de Heem and Willem Kalf were creating pronk still lifes that abounded with luxury objects.⁴ Van Aelst's inclusion of luxury objects in his flower paintings is therefore not unique to his work, but his

⁴ For instance, Willem Kalf's still life with a hunting horn in the National Gallery in London and Jan Davidsz. de Heem's pronk still life with a lobster in the Louvre. Although these paintings are not flower pieces they exhibit the interest in the depiction of luxury goods that likely motivated van Aelst.

persistence in this regard, and the particular choices of objects that he made speak to his engagement with opulent taste and preference⁵.

The relatively standard vase-form of flower painting is not the only type of flower painting that van Aelst produced. A small number of paintings from his oeuvre could be classed as posies, and these groups of flowers, laid on marble ledges form a distinct sub-type within the genre of flower painting. There are only four known examples of this type in his oeuvre, and all four date to a three-year period between 1675 and 1677. Perhaps the best known examples are located in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (figure 28) and the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge (figure 29). The two other examples were on the market with David Koetser from 1992-1995 (figure 30) and at auction at Christie's in 1999 (figure 31).⁶ All four paintings follow the same general form and are distinguished from one another only by the disposition and types of flowers, and other details such as insects.⁷ Other elements, like the luxury objects so frequently found in his vase paintings are not present in these pictures. They have a spare and intimate quality, at once close studies of bunches of flowers and precious, decorative collector's objects. As with the larger vase paintings, the black background heightens the sense of preciousity felt with these paintings. The earliest of the group, the 1675 picture in the Fitzwilliam Museum, is perhaps the most lively of the four. In addition to a fly and a climbing caterpillar who is

⁵ Further discussion of van Aelst's engagement in this regard is discussed below in chapter four. Paul Taylor also noted the significance of the inclusion of luxury objects in van Aelst's flower pieces, and suggests that van Aelst took this combination to a new, heightened level. Paul Taylor, *Dutch Flower Painting, 1600-1720* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). 176

⁶ The information on these two paintings stems initially from research done at the RKD. The Christie's painting was on sale in London, 1999-07-09, nr. 27.

⁷ Interestingly, all four have virtually identical dimensions, approximately 32 x 26 cm.

the apparent cause of all of the partially eaten leaves, there is a large spider in the upper left corner. In reproductions it is difficult to tell whether there is a web to support its plump body, but we can presume that one was initially included, regardless of whether it has survived today. The flowers included are pale pink roses in various stages of bloom from tight round bud to spent blossom, and two different colors of carnation, a deeper, variegated pink and a pale, chalky pink. The tonality of the painting therefore is largely pink and rosy, with green leaves and stems, the brown and grey section of marble and the fat brown and gold body of the spider. The inclusion of insects must have appealed to van Aelst because they appear in two of the other three posy pictures, the exception being the painting in the Ashmolean. Indeed, the inclusion of insects is not surprising given their frequent presence in van Aelst's other paintings. The flowers included in the four paintings are all pink or pale red, with the exception of what appear to be orange marigolds in the Ashmolean and Christie's pictures. In addition to roses, carnations and marigolds, the Christie's painting is also unique because it includes a thistle, draping pendulously over the front edge of the table. The posy, therefore, is a small sub-type within the larger oeuvre of van Aelst's flower paintings.

Although flower paintings are one of the genres that van Aelst is best known for, it should be noted that flower pieces actually comprise a relatively small portion of his oeuvre, even taking into account lost or undiscovered works. Given the size of his oeuvre, these flower paintings actually make up less than a quarter of the total. Further discussion will reveal that van Aelst's greatest production were his hunt and fruit pieces.

The Fruit Piece

The fruit pieces that can be attributed to van Aelst make up approximately one-third of his oeuvre. As with his flower paintings, across this relatively broad spectrum of production there are a number of consistent characteristics that mark his fruit pieces. Unlike in his flower paintings, it is difficult to discuss a high-period work of the 1660's, because his greatest production of fruit pieces occurred both early and late in his career. This discussion, therefore, will center around a number of paintings that enable consideration of the various characteristics that exemplify van Aelst's fruit pieces.

The Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp owns a 1659 fruit piece that is in many ways unique for van Aelst (figure 32). The curtain draped background and the elaborate reflections depicted in the *roemer* are not typical for van Aelst's work.⁸ The composition, the types of fruit and the visual effects, however, are fully typical of his oeuvre. The purple and green grapes and peaches are the most commonly found fruits in his paintings. Indeed, unlike many other Dutch still life painters, van Aelst painted very few citrus fruits, and there are only a handful of paintings in which he attempts a lemon, and only once with a dangling peel. That he deliberately chooses not to depict this ubiquitous feature of Dutch still life speaks to his attempts to find a new vocabulary for the genre. Across his oeuvre van Aelst replaces the more commonly found lemon with a dangling peel, with a pocket watch with a blue ribbon hanging into the foreground. This

⁸ Indeed, these elements set the painting apart, and the date, so soon after his arrival in Amsterdam, suggests that this was a painting in which van Aelst sought to demonstrate his skill. The painting will be the subject of more extensive discussion in chapter five.

device has the same effect as the lemon's peel, but the use of such a luxury good as a signature element connotes an awareness of the level of patron for which he was working. In terms of frequency of appearance in his fruit paintings, however, peaches replace lemons in van Aelst's oeuvre. Frequently, the pyramidal stack of four peaches seen in the Antwerp painting is the way in which van Aelst chooses to depict these fruits. Van Aelst displays a great sensitivity to the soft fuzz of their skin and frequently depicts them with bruising, small rotted patches or gouges suggesting damage or attack by insects. Peach leaves, which always surround and provide a backdrop for the fruits, are a favorite subject for van Aelst. He devotes great attention to the shine of the leaves, as well as to the manner in which the central vein of the leaf produces a pronounced rippling on either side of it that progresses down the body of the leaf. This center ripple, which resembles a section of ruffled fabric, is essential to the curl of the leaf and its sculptural presence. In addition this center vein, because of the mottled reflections it causes along its length, helps to emphasize the slick, almost shiny surface of the peach leaf. Indeed, van Aelst's pupil, Rachel Ruysch, carries on this effect in her depictions of peach leaves (figure 33). The manner in which the leaves of van Aelst's peaches both rise up behind and dangle down in front of the peaches themselves helps to create the larger form of the composition that he is aiming for. The leaves of the grapes and their curling tendrils accomplish this to an even greater extent in this composition. The grape leaves give height and movement to what would be a relatively low, flat composition.

The use of leaves for compositional purposes, an effect we already observed in his flower paintings, is also visible in a number of his other fruit paintings.⁹ For instance, a 1670 fruit piece that was on the market in the early 1990's, exhibits a very similar use of leaves (figure 34). Two early works, the 1649 fruit piece in the Delft Prinsenhof Museum (figure 6) and the 1650 work currently with Otto Naumann (figure 35) display van Aelst's early use and experimentation with this device. In both of these early works the leaves rise up behind the relatively low mass of fruit to create height and a strong pyramidal composition. This keen awareness of composition and form is a hallmark of van Aelst's work.

The degree to which other still life painters used this device in their fruit paintings varied. For instance, Willem Kalf (figure 36) shows some tendency towards this use of foliage for compositional purpose in his c. 1660 painting, however this is a fairly subtle and unusual instance. Indeed, the classification of Kalf's painting as a pure fruit piece is not wholly correct since this work straddles the line between fruit painting and *pronk* still life paintings. Jan Davidsz de Heem, however, certainly employs the device in his fruit paintings. For instance, the large 1648-9 painting in Berlin (figure 37) is activated by the branch of grapevine that wreathes its way diagonally across the composition. Furthermore, the wreath of olive leaves, cocked jauntily on the uppermost *roemer* provides an echoing diagonal. Earlier painters, like Balthasar van der Ast also used leaves

⁹ In the catalogue of the Daisy Linda Ward still lifes at the Ashmolean Museum, Fred Meijer, while writing on their small van Aelst still life of peaches, grapes and walnuts observes the following about the leaves in van Aelst's fruit pictures: "...vine leaves like gathering storm clouds hover over mounds of grapes." Meijer, *Ward*. 149.

compositionally, but to less dramatic effect. For instance, the earliest known still life by van der Ast dated 1620, located in the Mauritshuis (figure 38), uses a halo of leaves that extend the rounded composition upwards and to the left. The effect is much less dramatic than van Aelst's example (figure 34) in that van der Ast simply widens the existing lines of his fruit piece. Van Aelst's leaves by contrast, become active and vigorous parts of painting, shaping the work's outline and form.

Perhaps the best known still life painting to use this device is the 1597 Caravaggio basket of fruit in Milan (figure 39). Silhouetted against the creamy background, the leaves in this painting extend and enliven the composition. By contrast, van Aelst silhouettes his leaves against a very dark background. The contrast is not as sharp, but the ultimate effect is strikingly similar to Caravaggio's work. That this painting by Caravaggio was in Milan at the time that van Aelst was in Italy is suggestive to say the least. Although he certainly was influenced by his fellow countrymen, the possibility that Caravaggio's painting played a role in his dramatic, sculptural use of leaves is not at all implausible.

On the silver platter in the Antwerp picture (figure 32), next to the peaches are chestnuts, partially hulled. The combination of nuts and peaches is one of which van Aelst was especially fond. More frequently than chestnuts, he chose to depict walnuts, paying great attention to the gnarled and textural meat of the nut. The 1670 work, cited above (figure 34) is an excellent example of this. Why the combination of fruits and nuts was favored by van Aelst is unclear. It is possible, as Julie Berger Hochstrasser posits,

that this combination was reflective of common dietary practice of the time. Indeed, Hochstrasser explains that nuts were commonly believed to counteract poison, and likewise peaches were believed to be fruits that should only be eaten in moderation and only accompanied by much to drink.¹⁰ It is difficult to say whether these traditional food pairings fully explain van Aelst's consistent depictions of peaches and nuts; it is clear that, like Willem Kalf (figure 36) he was also entranced by the complex juxtapositions of surface textures.¹¹

The surface effect visible on the grapes in the Antwerp painting is another characteristic which van Aelst, and indeed, many other still life painters like de Heem, Mignon and others, worked hard to master.¹² This kind of white bloom on the surface of the fruit, obscured in places by moisture or where the grapes have been touched, is standard vocabulary for the depiction of grapes in Dutch still life paintings of the mid to late seventeenth-century. Van Aelst was quite successful in rendering this visual effect, but de Heem was truly the master of this technique (figure 40), and Jan van Huysum, among others, was to bring it forward into the eighteenth-century (figure 41). Grapes

¹⁰ Julie Berger Hochstrasser, "Life and Still Life: A Cultural Inquiry into Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still Life Painting" (The University of California at Berkeley, 1995). 46, 62-64. Ken Albala, *Eating Right In the Renaissance* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2002). 96, 194-195. Albala does not discuss the pairing of peaches and nuts, however he does note the unfavorable attitude towards peaches, mainly because of their cool, moist qualities.

¹¹ Hochstrasser herself sensitively observes the great possibility of visual effects that these subjects afford. Hochstrasser, "Life". 47-48.

¹² Arie Wallert, ed., *Still Lifes: Techniques and Style An Examination of Paintings from the Rijksmuseum* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1999). 29. In the essay in this volume on still life sources, the text of Daniel King's mid-1650's treatise on oil painting is discussed. At several points in King's text he credits recipes to "Mr Deheem," undoubtedly referring to Jan Davidsz de Heem. One of these recipes is for the depiction of the highlights on grapes. Whether van Aelst knew of or used this recipe is unclear, however the remarkable results of de Heem's recipe visible in still lifes both by himself and students like Abraham Mignon would certainly have been known to van Aelst.

were not the only fruits to be depicted in this manner, plums also were depicted with similar surface bloom on their skins (figure 6).

Peaches and grapes, although they were found most frequently, were not the only fruits to fill van Aelst's fruit pieces. Plums were certainly present, as noted above, but he also included melons of several different varieties, the occasional citrus fruit, cherries, figs and pomegranates. Interestingly, and this is particularly the case for the citrus, melons, figs and pomegranates, paintings including these fruits are found almost exclusively in his French and Italian production (figures 13, 42 & 43). It is tempting to suggest that his exposure to a greater variety of produce more commonly found in these relatively warmer climates inspired him to depict these fruits, although the true motivation and indeed the plausibility of this suggestion is not clear. The appearance of these fruits in his oeuvre does however mark a temporary expansion beyond what was to become his traditional repertoire.

As is apparent from the fruit piece in Antwerp, van Aelst's fruit pieces were frequently not exclusively of fruit. The combination of fruit with silver, glassware and other luxury articles was very common for van Aelst. This tendency began when he was working for the Medici (Figures 13, 15 & 42). Shortly after he returned to the Netherlands, he created the Antwerp painting (figure 32) which combines peaches and grapes with a *roemer* and a silver charger. The *roemer* is not itself a true luxury good, however it is indicative of van Aelst's liking for the combination of glassware and fruits that would become more frequent in his work. A 1667 painting in Budapest is an

excellent example of this subject (Figure 44). Here van Aelst has combined peaches and grapes with a *façon de venise tazza* and in the background is the barest suggestion of a tall flute glass. The gleam of the glassware seems the ideal foil for the muted quality of the skin of the peaches and the soft luster of the velvet cloth.

The silver platter in the Antwerp picture is an element van Aelst frequently pairs with peaches. He uses this kind of platter for its reflective qualities, as it picks up color from surrounding objects and provides a bright accent against the fruit and surrounding objects. A pyramid of peaches frequently sits atop this kind of platter, their yellow orange flesh is usually mirrored in the raised lip of the plate. Rather late in his career, van Aelst introduced another sort of luxury object. In a 1681 painting in the Hermitage, peaches and grapes are combined not only with the more traditional silver platter, velvet cloth and marble tabletop, but also with an elaborate, auricular silver standing salt (figure 45). This object, truly something only the very wealthiest citizen might have owned, changes van Aelst's fruit piece from an elegant display of fruit into a luxury object itself.¹³ By consistently including such costly goods in his paintings, not only in his fruit pieces, as we have just seen, but also in his flower pieces, van Aelst is effectively raising the status and value of his paintings and thereby raising his own artistic status in the process.

In addition to fruit still lifes in which the fruit simply lays atop the draped table or on a platter, van Aelst also painted two additional compositional variations. The first of these, of which there are only a small number, depicts fruit mounded up within or spilling

¹³ This kind of object, most likely the production of a silversmith like Johannes Lutma or Abraham van Vianen, will be the subject of greater discussion in the section on fish paintings in this chapter and also in chapter five.

out of a basket. There are five fruit pieces in which baskets play a major compositional role, two examples are in the Palazzo Pitti and a private collection (figures 46 & 47). In all of these works the basket is low and in all but the example from the Pitti, the basket has handles. Interestingly, the paintings all date to either the beginning, 1650-1653, or very late in his career, 1677. The use of this kind of low basket in a fruit piece is certainly not without precedent. Caravaggio's basket of fruit is an obvious precursor, but Balthasar van der Ast also painted numerous fruit pieces in this format, for instance the c. 1622 painting at the National Gallery of Art (figure 48).

The second compositional variation that exists in van Aelst's fruit pieces is a direct analog to the small posy paintings found in his flower pieces. These works are relatively intimate in scale, and typically depict a small bunch of fruit in very close focus, without any other accoutrements and frequently accompanied by insects or even a mouse. There is an equally small number of these works, and they are spread throughout his career. The first is the simple 1646 fruit piece that is in the Weldon collection (figure 4). Later works in his mature style, such as the 1674 private collection painting depicting three improbably stacked peaches and their branch, a cluster of grapes, a white moth and delicately painted mouse (figure 49). These small intimate paintings, of which there are four total, are indicative of the tendency in van Aelst's later work towards smaller, more jewel-like paintings. Their finish is generally very fine, and as we see in figure 49, the surfaces of objects are painted in a soft, almost hazy manner, as if the pigment has been blended like pastel.

The fruit pieces of Willem van Aelst, therefore, are a large and distinctive group. They range widely in subject, frequently including silver, glassware and other precious objects. The type of fruit depicted is distinctly limited after his period abroad, restricted mainly to peaches, grapes, and nuts with some variations. As in his flower paintings, the leaves play a vital sculptural and structural role, twisting and stretching the shape of the composition. Direct influence from artists like Balthasar van der Ast as well as Jan Davidsz de Heem is discernible, although the paintings he produces remain uniquely his own largely due to the elegance and polish of his painting style.

The Hunt Piece

Willem van Aelst's hunt pieces, like his fruit paintings, comprise approximately one third of his total oeuvre. They range greatly in size, composition and complexity, although there are discernible types and trends within his work. Common across all of his hunt pieces is van Aelst's customary fine technique; as with his fruit and flower paintings, a liking for the inclusion of elegant objects, in this case, accoutrements of the hunt; the tendency to paint predominantly birds, as well as a general sense of compositional balance and control in the way that game is painted. However, van Aelst's dead animals are generally not depicted with lolling heads, protruding tongues, ugly wounds or rolling eyes. They usually show very little sign of the means of their demise aside from a discreet trickle of blood. Naturally there are exceptions to these generalities, but broadly, they hold true.

One of the strongest examples of van Aelst's hunt pieces is the 1661 game piece in the National Gallery of Art (figure 50). This is one of the few game pieces in which van Aelst depicts a hare (there are two other firmly attributable paintings, both executed while van Aelst was in Italy). The painting is generous in size, as befits a work of this date, and complex in composition, containing some seven creatures. The two dominant animals, the rooster and the hare, are suspended by their feet and form a tight, steep pyramidal composition. Like many of van Aelst's high period flower pieces (figure 21) the composition swoops into an elegant, slightly curved upper right to lower left diagonal. Between the hare and rooster is a partridge and to the left, hanging from their beaks are a kingfisher, a common wheatear and another small songbird in the shadows.¹⁴ To the right of the cream colored rooster is another rooster, almost lost in the shadows but visible by its iridescent neck feathers and arcing black tail feathers. Hunting accoutrements in the painting include two red falcon hoods with feathered tufts on top hanging between the smaller birds, and a blue velvet game bag with gold fringed and braided trim and a silver fastener. In addition to these accoutrements, the entire composition rests on a marble tabletop that is supported by an elaborate frieze below of Diana and Actaeon, depicting an incident taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Wheelock, *Dutch*. 3-5.

¹⁵ This frieze of Diana and Actaeon was frequently employed by van Aelst in his hunt pieces and its implications and significance will be discussed below. For specific consideration of it in light of this painting see Paul Barolsky, "Still Life and Metamorphosis," *Source* 14, no. 2 (1995). Moreover, further information can be found on the source for this frieze in Gér Luijten et al., eds., *Dawn of the Golden Age: Northern Netherlandish Art 1580-1620* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1993).

There are a number of characteristics that this painting possesses that are common to the majority of van Aelst's hunt paintings. Perhaps the broadest of these characteristics is the way that the animals are arrayed. It was noted above that the game is usually depicted with great compositional control. This is indeed visible in the National Gallery painting. The rooster and the hare both hang tidily by both feet, their legs held together or even crossed, and their bodies arrayed below in tight, compact forms. The wings of the rooster, instead of splaying out broadly and giving the impression of a lack of restraint, only extend slightly out from the sides of the bird, somewhat broadening the shape it makes in the composition. The head of the rooster curves up and onto the tabletop, continuing the line created by the left wing of the bird. Adjacent to and echoing the shape of the rooster is the body of the hare, curving in the opposite direction. As with the rooster's wings, the hare's paws do not hang askew or outside of the pyramidal shape formed by the bodies of the rooster and the hare.

The only bird that is hanging somewhat awkwardly by one foot is the partridge, whose tail feathers protrude horizontally towards the smaller birds on the left. The free foot of the partridge dangles down, but it is projecting towards the picture plane so is foreshortened and therefore does not disrupt the composition. Even the wings of the partridge which should, given that the bird is hanging unencumbered, open more fully, only open slightly and do not disturb the overall pyramidal form. The three small birds that hang above with the falcon hoods are suspended vertically, their beaks pointing directly upwards. They too cluster together to form a smooth, compact shape. Almost as a

foil for the left and right facing heads of the hare and the rooster, the two red falcon hoods point to the left and right of the cluster of birds. As if to echo the placement of the group of small birds, the strap of the game bag hangs down over the front edge of the ledge on which the composition is placed. This parallel is accentuated by the brilliant blue in the wings of the kingfisher and its resonance in the brilliant blue of the velvet side of the strap of the bag.¹⁶ In addition to balancing the cluster of birds hanging above, the strap of the hunting bag also serves to draw the viewer's attention to the frieze that fills the lower portion of the painting.

The sort of careful compositional balance just described is not unique to this National Gallery picture. The 1658 game piece in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam is an earlier example of the sort of compositional control and precise manipulation which van Aelst is capable of (figure 51). The painting contains four birds, including a hen, a rooster, a kingfisher and what seems to be a snipe. As with the National Gallery painting the composition is a strong pyramidal shape. The form of the composition is not created primarily by the bodies of the two large birds, however, which are strung up by their feet and draped almost parallel to one another, but instead by their protruding tail feathers and wings. The white hen, hanging from an iron hook, is draped in an elegant curve across the table. To extend the bird's shape to the right and create a wide base for the composition, van Aelst depicts the open wing of the hen in the foreground and her

¹⁶ Although there isn't any mention of this in the painting's files, it is likely that the blue used here is ultramarine or lapis lazuli, a costly blue pigment van Aelst favored. For further discussion of the use of this pigment see: Bergström, "Wonderful." And Luuk Struyck van der Loeff, "Op Zoek naar de Originele Kleuren van van Aelst," *Kunstschrift Openbaar kunstbezit* 3 (1987).

protruding tail feathers in the background. Both of these elements change the shape of the composition, and create a greater sense of animation. This animation is heightened by the array of loose and open feathers that van Aelst has painted. These include the ruff of neck feathers both curving upwards and hanging down over the front edge of the table; likewise the harder, stiffer wing feathers and the elegant, foreshortened curve they create; finally the subtle, fluid feathers that hang languidly above the wing. The form of the white hen is complimented by the darker and more varied feathers belonging to the rooster. The line of the rooster's body is a steep upper right to lower left diagonal. The white head, twisted awkwardly, seems almost to belong to another bird, and lies on the table beneath the body and parallel to the head of the white hen. Once again, the feathers of the rooster create the greatest compositional interest. In this case the tail feathers extend dramatically left, curving, twisting and gleaming an iridescent black. It is their presence, as a complement to the wing and tail feathers of the white hen, which gives the composition the breadth and the drama that it possesses. This effect is further accentuated by the wing of the small, brown snipe that hangs upside down above the rooster. The snipe's wing has opened out and its tip points to the left, parallel with the tail feathers of the rooster. Moreover, the blue tones in the black tail feathers and the black armband of the rooster are picked up again by the brilliant blue in the small blue kingfisher that hangs between the hen and rooster. In this respect, van Aelst manipulates the bodies and the feathers of the birds that he paints, making them conform to and enhance the painting's composition. Unlike in the National Gallery painting, here he creates compositional form

through expressive use of feathers, a direct analog to his employment of leaves in his fruit and flower paintings.

The scale and complexity of the Rijksmuseum and National Gallery paintings is consistent with their dating to van Aelst's early years in Amsterdam. During this time, the hunt pieces he created were ambitious and large scale. In approximately the late 1660's, he developed a compositional variation that resulted in paintings that were smaller, usually only containing one bird or two, frequently accompanied by a range of hunting accoutrements. This new type became fairly standard production for van Aelst's hunt pieces, and the percentage of larger compositions created dropped significantly. A strong example of this new compositional type is the 1671 hunt piece in the Staatliches Museum in Schwerin (figure 52). Unlike his larger works, this relatively small painting depicts only a single bird. The partridge hangs from one foot, its free foot dangling, wings open and head laying atop a gold and velvet game bag. The surface on which the composition is built is a marble slab with a coved edge, something that usually remains constant throughout his work, although in this case, unlike in the two larger paintings just examined, the tabletop is low in the composition and no frieze is depicted below. This change is fully in keeping with this later, smaller type. Also consistent is the abundance of hunting paraphernalia. Earlier, larger works also contain accoutrements, to be sure, but the quantity and the consistency reaches a new level in these later works. In the Schwerin painting alone there is an elegant game bag, a bundle of sticks indicating a bird net, a hunting horn, two falcon hoods and three bird whistles. Moreover, these accoutrements

become standardized in his late work, recurring with consistency. Why precisely van Aelst shifted the bulk of his production to these smaller works is not clear. It is tempting to speculate that these smaller works were more saleable, or that he was responding to market demand, but the real reason remains elusive.

Aside from the birds, the Rijksmuseum painting is bare of hunting accoutrements. The only recurring element is the frieze that supports the simple stone tabletop. The National Gallery painting contained falcon hoods and a game bag and the Schwerin painting was filled with an array of implements. As in his fruit and flower paintings, van Aelst included a range of associated and sometimes luxurious objects within his compositions. Although they are not always elegant, the range of objects in his hunt paintings is among the highest, rivaled only by the objects included in his fish paintings. Some of these objects include guns, velvet coats, bridles, swords and lidded baskets.

A painting that is now in the Royal Collection and housed at Hampton Court Palace (figure 53) is an example of the breadth and frequent opulence of objects included. The objects in the Schwerin painting are largely functional, they have to do with the physical business of hunting, the Hampton Court Palace painting is another matter entirely. The painting contains functional objects including two falcon hoods, a tasseled hunting horn and an unusual green velvet game bag. In addition to these objects, however, van Aelst included a silver, faceted object that gleams like a jewel in its nest of green velvet. It appears to be the handle of a dagger or sword, but a truly magnificent one. It is at once an object that is related to the hunt, but also marks the painting as

privileged. Indeed, it is likely that Charles II acquired this painting from van Aelst when he was exiled in the Netherlands.¹⁷

The care with which van Aelst paints the hunting accoutrements and other objects he puts in his game pieces is equal to the attention he devotes to the game itself. Not only is van Aelst careful to render the different textures and varieties of feathers, the hard beaks, the soft fleshy combs and the scaly feet, but he also devotes great attention to worn, well used leather, velvet in saturated hues and the multiple strands of thick, metallic tassel. His attention to and skill in rendering these details is perhaps his greatest hallmark and makes his work distinctive among other still life painters. Nevertheless, there are a number of other painters whose hunt pieces are similar to van Aelst's and whose work warrants some brief consideration here.

The first, and closest of these is the work of the painter Cornelis Lelienbergh. Lelienbergh was first recorded in 1646 when he joined the artist's guild in The Hague.¹⁸ His work bears the greatest resemblance to van Aelst's. However, although he can sometimes approach the level of detail that van Aelst includes, the overall design and composition of his paintings is not as sophisticated or elegant. Unlike other game painters related to van Aelst, Lelienbergh was able to occasionally display the technical mastery and finish that van Aelst consistently exhibited. A good example of Lelienbergh's work is the 1654 painting in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (figure 54). William Gowe Ferguson, the Scottish painter who was working in the Netherlands by mid-century also

¹⁷ White, *Dutch*. Catalog number 9.

¹⁸ Willigen and Meijer, *Dictionary*. 130.

drew great inspiration from the work of van Aelst, but his work is easily discernible. Not only is Ferguson's brushwork notably looser than van Aelst's, but the anatomical forms of his birds always appear somewhat inaccurate and disjointed. Jan Weenix naturally drew the majority of his inspiration from his father Jan Baptist Weenix and his work is easily discernible from van Aelst's by the frequent outdoor setting and the more pronounced brushwork. Nevertheless, the elegance in his hunt pieces is indicative of the same demand for refined game pieces to which van Aelst and other artists like Melchior de Hondecoeter were responding. In general, it can be said that van Aelst, although not singularly so, was certainly a major figure in the development and refinement of the genre of the game piece.

The Forest Floor Still Life

The genre of the forest floor still life was made most famous by van Aelst's contemporary in Rome, Otto Marseus van Schrieck around the middle of the seventeenth-century. The genre was carried further by artists like Mathias Withoos as well as van Aelst's pupil Rachel Ruysch. As the most representative painter of the genre, Otto Marseus van Schrieck's paintings typically focus on the base of a tree or a forest clearing that is inhabited by a range of creatures such as frogs, toads and snakes, as well as frequently moths and butterflies. These creatures interact with one another, sometimes in violent ways, and we are frequently shown a moment of conflict in which one creature is

on the verge of attacking another.¹⁹ For instance, in this 1669 forest floor still life, van Schrieck depicts a range of creatures at the foot of a tree in a dim landscape (figure 55). The snake is in pursuit of one of the moths that flutter before it, while a small lizard and a snail sit below its coils. Otto Marseus van Schrieck's development of the genre sprung from his interest in scientific observation, a quality which was already apparent when he was in Italy. While in Rome he received the name *snuffelaer* (the ferret or "sniffer") from the *Bentvueghels*, a name that referred to his tendency to sniff out new plants and animals for his collection.²⁰

Willem van Aelst's foray into the genre was fairly limited, with only seven paintings in his oeuvre that can be classified as forest floor still lifes. Three of these paintings are combinations of the genres of the forest floor still life and the hunt still life (Figures 56, 57 & 58). The other four forest floor still lifes center on the themes typical of the genre, with a particular interest in chameleons, and sculptural plants like thistles (Figures 59, 60, 61). With the exception of the paintings done in 1654 (figure 56) and 1682, all of van Aelst's forest floor paintings were executed in the 1670's. In particular, there is a concentration of these works during the years 1670 and 1671. At this time Otto Marseus van Schrick, who van Aelst likely knew from Italy, was living just outside Amsterdam and it is possible to speculate that these paintings may have been inspired by his proximity.

¹⁹ For a thorough and engaging study of the van Schrieck's nature pieces see Hildebrecht, "Otto"; Useful for a brief overview of the genre is Marianne Berardi, "The Nature Pieces of Rachel Ruysch," *Porticus* 10-11 (1987).

²⁰ Houbraken, *Schouburgh*. Vol.1 358.

One of the most monumental of van Aelst's forest floor paintings is his 1671 *Still Life with Thistle* in the Staatliches Kunsthalle in Karlsruhe (Figure 59). The focus of this striking painting is the large sculptural thistle plant which virtually fills the picture plane. The leaves are strongly three-dimensional, with pronounced spines and a twisting, curving quality that typifies van Aelst's painted leaves, in particular the poppy leaves that are so prominent in a number of his flower paintings. A total of about seven thistle flowers, great spiky pincushions, are scattered throughout the plant. Around, beneath and within the plant are a range of tiny creatures including a mouse, a spider, a frog and a snail. These animals appear to make the massive thistle their home, in particular the spider, whose delicate gossamer web is barely visible and yet attached to the leathery leaves of the plant. The coloring of the painting is remarkably limited to a range of deep green and brown tones that give the painting a dark, almost gloomy effect. The paint appears to be applied rather thinly, with van Aelst's customary use of glazes. The background is dark in tone, almost black, with very little indication of a setting for the towering plant. The only suggestion of the surrounding forest is visible in the mossy ground van Aelst has depicted around the base of the thistle. The moss is rendered in a peculiar manner which suggests that van Aelst may indeed have been interacting with Otto Marseus van Schrieck. The textured paint indicating the moss in van Aelst's painting appears to be sponged or daubed on, rather than applied with a brush. As the work of Doug Hildebrecht on Otto Marseus van Schrieck has shown, van Schrieck often used either a sponge or perhaps even actual moss, on which paint was applied and then

daubed onto the canvas to create a realistic and textural impression of the forest floor.²¹

Van Schrieck also used actual butterfly wings in his paintings, adhering them to the canvas, something that van Aelst did not do.²² The singular, almost portrait-like treatment of the thistle has parallels in the work of van Schrieck, who also created paintings depicting single plants (figure 62). Doug Hildebrecht has rightly connected this type of painting with illustrated herbals and botanical treatises, noting how similar conventions of display are found in van Schrieck's paintings.²³ Van Aelst's painting of the thistle appears to be less concerned with this kind of display, with considerably less attention paid to the depiction of all of the different stages and growth cycles of the plant. Instead, van Aelst employs the thistle as a sculptural element, exploring the dramatic, three-dimensional forms its leaves create.

A similar lack of interest in scientific display is seen in the chameleon that van Aelst employs in three of his forest floor still lifes. Otto Marseus van Schrieck also includes this metamorphic lizard in one of his paintings, but his work, as Hildebrecht suggests, is concerned with creating a visual record of an experimental observation of the unique qualities the chameleon possessed.²⁴ In his depiction of the chameleon, van Schrieck deliberately includes a snake in order to depict the perceived antipathy that existed between the lizard and snakes and to provoke the lizard to puff up in self-

²¹ Hildebrecht, "Otto". 137-140.

²² Hildebrecht, "Otto". 137-140.

²³ Hildebrecht, "Otto". 126.

²⁴ Hildebrecht, "Otto". 261-262.

defense.²⁵ By contrast, van Aelst's chameleon is depicted in a more stylized manner, and with less attention to precise detail than van Schrieck (Figure 60). In terms of the chameleon's natural properties, van Aelst appears only to be interested in the creature's changing skin color. Accordingly, he places the lizard on a rock in full sunlight allowing the chameleon to display coloring typical to such full exposure to light.²⁶

It is clear from van Aelst's approach to the genre of the forest floor still life that his focus was primarily on the visual qualities of the scenes he chose to depict. Unlike Otto Marseus van Schrieck, whose work is immersed in the natural sciences, van Aelst dabbled in the genre for the distinctive plant forms and range of exotic creatures it gave him license to depict. It is quite possible that van Aelst shared some of van Schrieck's interest in the natural sciences, however the relatively small number of forest floor still lifes in his oeuvre, as well as their minimal concern with the scientific details so present in van Schrieck's work, suggests that he largely chose not to explore this interest through his paintings.

The Fish Piece

The origins of the fish piece undoubtedly lie in the Flemish market paintings of Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Beuckelaer. These large scale, carefully described works were usually not exclusively still life paintings, frequently including figures, religious scenes in the background and sometimes acting as large scale allegories. All three of

²⁵ Hildebrecht, "Otto". 266.

²⁶ Hildebrecht, "Otto". 267

these qualities are present in the monumental allegory of water by Joachim Beuckelaer (figure 63). Gradually the independent fish piece begins to emerge from these early forbears, and becomes a distinct type.²⁷ Generally, the fish piece retains some vestiges of its origins, though. Sometimes it is simply an allusion to a market or kitchen setting, frequently in the form of a composition with associated conventions like baskets, scales or cooking accoutrements. In other instances, reference is made to the means by which the fish was caught, such as a background of a beach or the depiction of fishing gear. Somewhat later, fish paintings take on some associations with a meal or a banquet, being paired with other food and vessels for drink (figure 64). The fish paintings of Willem van Aelst, however, changed this dynamic entirely.

Initial examination of van Aelst's earliest fish paintings suggests that his approach will be entirely conventional. His 1653 fish painting, executed while he was in Italy, is an excellent example of his early approach to the genre (figure 65). The fish are only a portion of the composition, and the other elements such as the pottery, basket, artichokes and other dead animals suggests a kitchen setting, or perhaps an association with the market. The relation with the large Flemish works that formed the original basis for the origins of the fish piece is not difficult to discern.

However barely four years later, back in Amsterdam, it becomes apparent that van Aelst has no intention of pursuing the traditional approach his 1653 painting suggested

²⁷ The most comprehensive study of the subject of fish still life painting can be found in the fascinating 2004 exhibition catalog from the Centraal Museum: Liesbeth Helmus et al., *Fish: Still Lifes by Dutch and Flemish Masters 1550-1700* (Utrecht: Centraal Museum, 2004). In addition, a slightly more abridged view of the subject can be found in Bergström, *Dutch*. 229-245.

(Figure 66). With this remarkable adaptation of the genre of the fish piece van Aelst elevates the genre from one associated with kitchens and markets, to one associated with luxury objects and great elegance. His goal in this regard is undoubtedly to appeal to a more affluent buyer. His model is not difficult to determine. Particularly evident in this painting is its relationship to both the content and the composition of the work of Willem Kalf, specifically his luxury still life of 1656 (figure 67). In terms of content, the silver pitcher in van Aelst's painting (Figure 66) is similar to the one found in Kalf's. In fact, some years later, in 1659, a pitcher virtually identical to the one seen in Kalf's painting appears in a *pronk* still life by van Aelst (Figure 68). This pitcher has been identified as the 1632 production of Christiaan van Vianen, after his father Adam van Vianen (Figure 69).²⁸ The inclusion of a large silver pitcher, such as the one by van Vianen or the similar one pictured in van Aelst's 1653 fish piece (Figure 66), in a still life painting would have had great appeal to a wealthy clientele. How either Kalf or van Aelst was able to access such a valuable object, however, remains unknown.

In terms of his compositional similarity to Willem Kalf, van Aelst adopts a vertical composition and uses a dark background to set off the gleaming silver and glassware. Moreover, in both paintings, the mundane objects relate to and interact with the objects of great value. In Kalf's painting, the lemon is reflected warmly in the side of the silver pitcher, and in van Aelst's painting the silvery, reflective fish echoes the cool silver and glassware in a remarkably sympathetic fashion. What distinguishes van Aelst from Kalf in terms of these two paintings is that Kalf's work can easily be classed as a

²⁸ Giltaij et al., *Gemaltes*. 29.

pronk still life, while van Aelst's painting straddles the line between the fish piece and a *pronk* still life. It is precisely this distinction which is van Aelst's most significant contribution.

Van Aelst continues to produce this newly developed style of fish painting throughout the remainder of his career. There are over sixteen fish paintings in his oeuvre, including his two early market style paintings. The majority of these were executed in the 1670's, rather late in van Aelst's career. Remarkably, the paintings are fairly uniform as a group, that is, there is variation, but very little development in terms of the compositional type. This may be due at least in part to the success and popularity of the type, however lacking sufficient price and market information, this is difficult to prove.

Because of the remarkable consistency of compositional type, a number of examples will be discussed not only to give a sense of the type, but also in order to provide examples of the variations that are present, particularly in terms of the objects depicted in the paintings.²⁹ The Copenhagen picture is an excellent example with which to begin (figure 66). As noted in comparison with the Willem Kalf painting, this is a tall, vertical composition, set against a very dark background, both qualities which are consistent with the rest of his fish paintings. The compositions of his fish pieces are all very steep and triangular in format, this, along with the black background adds a dramatic quality to his paintings. The display of the fish on the silver or silver colored platter is

²⁹ Further discussions of the fish piece in relation to concepts of artistic self consciousness can be found in chapter five. The chapter will show that fittingly, one of van Aelst's greatest innovations, the opulent fish piece, most clearly communicates his awareness of his own artistic skill.

also a standard characteristic. This both makes the fish stand out more prominently against the velvet cloth and heightens the effect of the deliberate juxtaposition of the silvery fish with the gleaming metal platter, and accordingly, with the other silver objects depicted. The elaborate silver pitcher, similar to the production of Christiaan van Vianen, is exemplary of the sort of luxury object that van Aelst's fish paintings most commonly included. In addition to its interplay with the scales of the fish, the pitcher also plays beautifully off of the elaborately worked *façon de venise* glassware that is behind and next to it. The manner in which van Aelst paints these elaborate glass objects is similar to that employed by Willem Kalf. Rather than depict the entire glass, van Aelst devotes the most attention to the opaque sections such as the stem, fluted bowl and lid in this case. He also is careful to indicate liquid, most likely wine, where its visual weight is needed. Other than these opaque passages, the glass is mostly suggested, indicated by occasional sweeps of pale glaze along the edges with transparent passages left largely undescribed. In this manner, van Aelst allows the viewer to mentally complete the glass, filling in by inference the areas where he has not painted it. The rich velvet cloth on the table, rather similar to that found in his fruit pieces and some of his flower pieces, helps to further deepen the color of the canvas, creating a dark background against which the silver, glassware and fish will gleam, jewel-like. The dried greens of the spring onion that dangle into the foreground are akin to the ribbon on the rock crystal watch and the straps of the hunting bag, extending the composition downward. The agate handled knife is also a frequently found element, often protruding forward off of the edge of the table, an

illusionistic device common to still life painting. The roll is often included by van Aelst in order to warm up the palette of his fish paintings, which are so dominated by cool, silvery colors. Moreover the bread, with its relatively loosely painted crust and crumbly white interior counterbalance the harder, more polished surfaces of glassware and metal.

The combination of foods that van Aelst depicts, specifically fish and onions in this painting, were certainly standard in still life painting, indeed, it has recently been observed that this particular pairing reflects recommended dietary practice in the seventeenth-century.³⁰ In addition, the manner in which the fish has been gutted and cut into sections was also recommended practice for the serving of fish. Indeed, Joseph de Bray describes not only the proper way to serve herring, but also the foods, such as onions, that should accompany it (figure 70).³¹

The silvery tonality of van Aelst's Copenhagen picture is not representative of the range of color he used in his fish paintings. His 1661 painting, now in Schwerin, is a remarkable example not only of the range of color possible in his fish paintings, but also of the different objects he depicted (figure 1). The core elements of van Aelst's fish paintings are there: fish, onion and bread paired with a luxury object in a vertical composition against a dark background. However in this painting, van Aelst has added

³⁰ Hochstrasser, "Life". 91-93.

³¹ Hochstrasser, "Life". 91-92 Hochstrasser discusses the de Bray picture, quoting from the text of the poem that is depicted. The poem encourages us to "not forget the onion" and describes how the herring should be cut and served. In this case, de Bray recommends that the head of the fish be removed, something that van Aelst chooses not to depict. Although the inclusion of the fish head is in no way unusual (it was commonly seen in monochrome breakfast paintings by Pieter Claesz. and Willem Claesz. Heda) it does mark a unique approach to the depiction of fish that was to become more pronounced in his later fish paintings. This approach has ramifications for the consideration of artistic self-consciousness in his work and will therefore be discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

ruddy red crabs, one dead, one suspiciously alive looking, peaches and grapes with their sculptural branches, and a stark white cloth, with crisply rendered folds and wrinkles. These elements not only signal a new development in van Aelst's fish painting, they greatly expand the range of available color and compositional possibilities. The fact that the foot of the nautilus cup is gilt silver and not plain silver introduces a warm, golden note in the color palette. This is echoed and enhanced by the golden-toned peaches, the red of the crab shells and the strikingly orange-colored roll. The nautilus shell itself heightens this color variation, reflecting the objects below it in a dull, iridescent gleam. Similarly the white cloth is painted with a striking range of color in its folds and wrinkles, both highlighting and harmonizing with the colors of the other objects in the painting. The fish, in comparison with the fish from the Copenhagen picture, is much warmer in tone, however its arrangement on the plate is also much more complex. The neatly arrayed sections of the fish in the Copenhagen picture have been replaced by a jumble of flesh and guts, a much more artful arrangement. Indeed, in his praise of pickled herring, Joseph de Bray noted that the guts of the fish should be removed, making van Aelst's depiction more notable and unusual for its divergence.³²

Compositionally, the painting is also more ambitious. Van Aelst uses the branches of the purple grapes as he does in many of his fruit paintings, to enlarge and fill out the composition. In this way, van Aelst can place the nautilus cup successfully off center

³² As noted above, these issues of display bear heavily on van Aelst's artistic self consciousness and will be discussed at greater length in chapter five. For discussion of Joseph de Bray as well as pickled herring in general see Gregor J. M. Weber, "'t Lof van den Pekelharingh. Von alltäglichen und absonderlichen Heringsstilleben," *Oud Holland* 101, no. 2 (1987).

without the painting feeling unbalanced. The white cloth is also an important element compositionally. Unlike in the Copenhagen picture where the dark velvet drops away visually, the white cloth accentuates the bottom of the composition, and allows van Aelst to display his mastery at the depiction of fabric. Moreover, the cloth acts as a canvas on which van Aelst can display the beautifully rendered admiral butterfly perched on the vertical fold. Finally, the cloth also takes the place of the pocket watch with its blue ribbon, descending into the foreground and blurring the boundary between the painting and real space.

The final picture is exemplary of the majority of van Aelst's fish paintings executed in the 1670's, its reddish tonality, strongly defined composition and established range of objects (figure 71). This painting is perhaps the most striking of a group of approximately five fish paintings completed in and around the year 1678. These paintings, like many of van Aelst's later works are notable not only for their skillful execution, but also the relative standardization of type that becomes apparent. In this painting, the coloration with which van Aelst was experimenting in the Schwerin painting here attains a harmonious combination of reds, warm ochres, and cool silvery grays set against a deep black background. As in his other fish paintings, the standard vertical pyramidal composition is present. The fish is a dominant foreground element, with careful distinctions between blue iridescent scales and buttery flesh and guts. Once again, there is an intended play between the similarly bi-colored auricular silver standing salt and the fish. The composition also gains much of its color from the red velvet cloth on

which it is arrayed. Glassware is used in the background to add an additional layer of sparkle and interest to the painting. Once again, the agate handled knife protrudes into the foreground. Many of these elements, the colored velvet, the glassware in the background, the agate knife, the elaborately arrayed fish, have by this point become van Aelst's standard repertoire for his fish paintings. These later works all bear a striking similarity to one another and are evidence of the process of standardization that can be observed in van Aelst's other major still life types.³³

Although they compose one of the smallest groups within van Aelst's oeuvre of still life painting, his fish pieces are some of his most innovative and influential paintings. His elevation and complete transformation of the genre is often overlooked in the study of fish painting. These stunning works transform the simple herring from an ordinary foodstuff to a gleaming, elegantly arrayed, sculptural object.

The *Pronk* Still Life:

It is fitting that the discussion of van Aelst's *pronk* paintings should follow on the heels of the discussion of his elegant fish paintings. Like his fish paintings, there are only a very small number of pure *pronk* still lifes in van Aelst's oeuvre. In a number of paintings that might be better classed as fruit pieces, fish pieces or even hunt pieces, van Aelst crosses decidedly into the realm of the luxury still life. Indeed, it can be said that van Aelst's oeuvre in general tends to infuse standard still life subjects with elements of

³³ Other issues of reproduction are also significant in this context. For a more specific discussion of these issues see chapter five.

the *pronk* still life such as elaborate vessels, velvet throws, and other luxury goods. For this reason it becomes difficult to separate out pure *pronk* paintings because in truth, many of his paintings might be considered to be so. Nevertheless, there is a distinct, if small, group of paintings that depict these luxury items and cannot be reasonably classed as other types of still life. These five paintings all date from the 1650's, from the period of his foreign travel and immediately thereafter. Unlike the other types of still life that van Aelst produced, there is not enough of a body of work to enable to broad classification of the paintings. There is great variation in scale; the paintings ranging in size from an intimate cabinet picture to a monumental painting well over six feet tall. There is also great variation in composition and in the objects depicted. All objects are of a luxurious type, but there is great variety in the specific items included. Accordingly, it is not possible to discuss these paintings in a broad and effective manner. This section will therefore consider several of these paintings, noting their significant qualities and discussing why these paintings can be viewed as pure *pronk* still lifes.

The earliest of these paintings is the 1651 still life in Vizovice that was discussed in chapter two (figure 9). The earlier discussion of this painting dealt largely with issues of attribution and the biographic clue which the medal presents to us. The painting is equally significant in this context because it is the first *pronk* still life in van Aelst's oeuvre, and it adheres to certain compositional and stylistic guidelines that occur across van Aelst's oeuvre. Like some of van Aelst's finest examples of fruit, hunt and fish paintings, van Aelst adopts a vertical format for this painting. The dominant metal teapot

on stand is the central focal point, forming the highest point of the composition. The jewelry box is placed to its left, filling the center of the composition with a blaze of rosy scarlet and an accent of gray-white pearls. Following the line of the jewelry box, the eye is led to the gold watch and ultimately the gold medallion. The coloring of the painting is striking for van Aelst, who normally pursues a more carefully balanced, controlled color scheme. In this work, however, the yellow gold of the medallion and watch are set off by a brilliant blue velvet tablecloth. The cloth also interacts with ribbon of the watch which is almost violet in its coloration. The coral red lining of the jewelry box is a vivid accent within the painting, the color also appearing briefly in the ribbon of the pearls in the left corner. The yellow of the watch and medal are picked up once again in the elaborately worked surface of the silver-gilt teapot. This veritable riot of color is set against the black background which was to become so ubiquitous for van Aelst. This black background, van Aelst quickly discovered, was an excellent foil for luxurious metal and glassware, allowing the objects to shine and gleam appealingly and heightening the colors painted against it. Notable in this still life, and one of the few constant qualities in his *pronk* still lifes, is the manner in which the luxury objects are displayed. They are carefully arrayed to display their attributes to best advantage: the contour of the teapot, the elaborate workings of the pocket watch or the coral red lining and tortoise-shell exterior of the jewelry box. Like his fish pieces, this painting bears much in common with Willem Kalf's elaborate *pronk* still lifes: the vertical composition, the dark background and the restricted focus on a few luxury goods. The still life by Kalf in the Rijksmuseum

compares favorably in this regard (figure 67). Van Aelst's still life is more vividly colored than Kalf's, and it is clear that he has not yet learned how to utilize the darkness to truly transform his objects in this early work. Nevertheless, the relatively spare use of objects, the strong vertical composition and the dark background are qualities common to both paintings.

The second *pronk* still life to be considered was painted during van Aelst's time in Florence (figure 10). Unlike the previous painting, this work is horizontal in format, and approaches the notion of the *pronk* still life somewhat differently. The objects included are still displayed favorably and clearly, however, the smoky, dark quality of Kalf's work is much more present in this painting. Objects in the shadows such as the peacock pie and the *façon de venise* glass *tazza* lose definition in a way that does not occur in the Vizovice painting. Moreover, the composition, while still a strong, if broad, triangular form, is much more complex and not as easily followed. The painting also contains fruits, although not enough to classify the work as a fruit piece. It is this kind of integration of still life types which makes it difficult to find many "pure" *pronk* still life paintings in van Aelst's oeuvre. The luxury objects depicted in this painting include the elaborate gilt vessel which forms the pinnacle of the composition, the mounted crystal vase, the double nautilus cup and the *façon de venise* glass *tazza*.³⁴ These objects are arrayed together against a richer, deeper palette of blue, white and black, with highlights in deep purple from the plums, yellow-gold from the oysters and lemon and points of red from the

³⁴ The double nautilus shell cup is an object which is actually in the collection of the Palazzo Pitti today. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

cherries. Although it was executed only two years later, the range of color is much smaller in this painting than in the 1651 work. This darker tonality corresponds to the other paintings that van Aelst was creating at the same time, such the 1652 still life with a melon that is also in the Pitti collection (figure 13). The painting ultimately represents a movement towards a more integrated type of still life, that is, the lines between *pronk* still life and fruit piece begin to blur slightly in this painting. This effect is heightened in the final *pronk* still life under consideration.

The 1659 *pronk* still life in Berlin progresses much further towards the integration of type discussed above (figure 68). This painting, once again in a vertical format, treads the line between a fruit piece and a *pronk* still life. The sumptuous silver pitcher (a similar version of which is depicted in figure 66), silver *bekerschroef*, *façon de venise* glass *tazza*, tall flute glass and large iridescent shell are all objects of value. They are paired with and complimented by a plate of peaches and an array of grapes. Once again, van Aelst uses the leaves and branches of the fruit to elaborate and fill in the composition. In this instance the composition is a strong triangular form, the *roemer* in the *bekerschroef* forming the highest point. From this portion of the composition the viewer's eye is led downwards through the silver pitcher to the plate of peaches, over to the shell and back up again through the grapes and leaves to the *roemer*. The leaves of the grapes and the peaches help to direct the eye and also soften the transitions between the array of hard-edged objects. This complimentary pairing of luxury objects and fruits is one that van Aelst was later to adopt for almost all of his fruit pieces. The manner in

which the organic forms of the fruits and leaves play off of the elaborate, shiny surfaces of metal and glassware was clearly something that appealed to van Aelst. Not only was it an effective visual combination, but it also elevated his fruit pieces, and made them more elegant and potentially more valuable.

The *pronk* still life as an independent type was relatively short lived in the oeuvre of Willem van Aelst, with the latest example (discussed above) dating to 1659. This lack of an independent presence by no means signaled the demise of the *pronk* still life in van Aelst's work. To the contrary, his distinctive choices in his paintings continually incorporated luxury objects in his depictions of relatively ordinary subjects like fruit and fish. As a result, his paintings retain the appeal and elegance of *pronk* still lifes, regardless of the subject matter. It is this elevation and increased elegance that truly marked the still lifes of van Aelst, and made his work an excellent precursor for the refined still lifes of later painters like Jan van Huysum and others.

Chapter Four: Patronage, The Market and the Original Copy

As the previous chapter made clear, Willem van Aelst was an artist who crafted his paintings with great care and forethought. Accordingly, when we examine the relationships that van Aelst had with his clients and patrons, whether actual or implied, this same self-consciousness is evident. The use of the words “client” and “patron” in this context are admittedly problematic. Apart from a very small number of pictures associated with his period with the Medici, no clear documentation exists to demonstrate that he made paintings for specific patrons. Even the works that van Aelst completed for the Medici are not easy to reconcile. I have not discovered records that reveal whether paintings with specific subjects were requested by members of the Medici family, or whether van Aelst was working more independently. It is clear, however, that there was prolonged and steady support for and interest in his work. Indeed, Cardinal Giovan Carlo owned seven of van Aelst’s paintings and Cardinal Leopoldo three, and Paolo del Sera referred to the favors that Cardinal Leopoldo had done for van Aelst.¹ Moreover, other inventories from Bologna, Amsterdam and Rome contain more than one painting by van Aelst, implying repeated interest in his work. While the mechanics of these relationships appear to be lost to us, it is clear that not only did van Aelst have clients who expressed continued interest in his work, but he also deliberately tailored his paintings to appeal to a particular clientele or group of patrons, something this chapter will demonstrate further.²

¹ See Chapter Two, pages 64-82.

² In his discussions of the Italian production of Otto Marseus van Schrieck, Douglas Hildebrecht addresses this conundrum of apparent support without actual documentation, and it is his work that I am modeling my definition after. Hildebrecht, "Otto". 251, note 4.

It is clear that van Aelst developed the awareness of the importance of appealing to the wishes and the taste of a particular clientele early in his career. The striking but frustratingly ambiguous relationship that van Aelst had with Jean-Michel Picart can be regarded as one of the earliest, and perhaps most crucial, stages in his awareness. This relationship was discussed briefly in chapter two, and we will revisit it here because of what it reveals about van Aelst's burgeoning awareness of the need to cater to the likes and dislikes of a particular clientele.³ The sole documents relating to the relationship between the two painters take the form of the two paintings by Picart and van Aelst respectively, which were also discussed in chapter two (figures 12 and 6). As noted before, it is likely that, because of the level of detail, the independent fruit piece by van Aelst was executed first, and the painting by Picart thereafter. If van Aelst and Picart did indeed collaborate on this project, and it seems unlikely that Picart would have taken the design of van Aelst's painting so directly without his awareness, van Aelst would have been exposed to the extensive and subtle constellation of market information Picart possessed. Particularly interesting in relation to van Aelst's career is the recognition that Picart showed of the precise interests of his prospective Parisian clients when he placed orders for new work with his supplier, Matthijs Musson in Antwerp.⁴ He exhibited a keen awareness of the sensitivity of potential buyers to such crucial aspects of images as

³ Chapter two, pages 56-64.

⁴ Marchi and Miegroet, "Novelty." 223-225. Some of the same material is also considered in: Montias, "The Sovereign Consumer: the Adaptation of Art to Demand in the Netherlands in the Early Modern Period." Particularly useful in this regard are pages 70-72. The original letters can be found in Jan Denucé, *Na Peter Pauwel Rubens: Documenten uit den kunsthhandel te Antwerpen in de XVIIe eeuw van Matthijs Musson* (Antwerp: Uitgave de Sikkel, 1949).

subject matter, refinement, quality of the painting, and finish. In particular he requested paintings that avoided indecorous subject matter such as figures that were too “peasantlike,” and unrefined, undesirable subjects like bats, serpents, wild boar and crocodiles. Moreover, his letters stressed that the paintings should be “suyver geschildert” (purely or well painted) and in the case of a group of landscape paintings, the skies should be “wat net syn ende met goede verven principal de lochten” (Principally the skies should be executed neatly and with quality paint).⁵ The level of market awareness that Picart’s orders communicate is remarkable and sophisticated. Indeed, the possibility that van Aelst may have worked for a time in Picart’s studio greatly increases the likelihood that van Aelst was exposed to his knowledge of the art market. Picart’s association with van Aelst, whatever form it ultimately took, cannot have failed to impart at least some small portion of this knowledge to van Aelst. Consequently it is very likely no coincidence that van Aelst’s paintings changed markedly during these years, exhibiting a much more conscious and deliberate choice of subject matter and an increasingly refined and elegant style.

Perhaps the most notable phase of this early development and awareness can be observed in the paintings van Aelst executed for the Medici in Florence. While the precise nature of the relationship van Aelst had with the Medici remains unknown, it is clear from the letters discussed in Chapter Two that both Cardinal Leopoldo and Cardinal Giovan Carlo offered support to the young artist. This took the form of introductions, in

⁵ These excerpts are all taken from Marchi and Miegroet, "Novelty." 223-225. I have made some slight adjustments to the translation of Picart’s order.

the case of Cardinal Giovan Carlo, who sent his work to the Roman dealer Fabrizio Piermattei, and then appears to have sent van Aelst himself to make his fortune and reputation there.⁶ More tangibly, their support also took the form of purchases of his paintings, seven of which were in the collection of Cardinal Giovan Carlo, and three of which were in the collection of Cardinal Leopoldo.⁷ Moreover, Cardinal Giovan Carlo apparently valued van Aelst's work highly enough that he gave one of his hunt paintings as a gift to his agent in Bologna, Ferdinando Cospi.⁸ The presence of van Aelst's painting in Bologna also explains the relatively large number of his paintings in contemporary Bolognese inventories. Indeed, there were at least fourteen paintings by van Aelst in Bolognese inventories, scattered among six different collectors.⁹ Unfortunately, the paintings described in these Bolognese inventories cannot be matched with existing works. Nevertheless the subject matter of the paintings described in the inventories, as well as the subjects of the paintings that were in the Medici collection provide an

⁶ All of this correspondence and the details surrounding it are discussed above in Chapter Two, pp. 64-82.

⁷ It is possible that even more paintings were owned by the Cardinals, as at least three of the paintings were noted in inventories as having pendants, which are now lost. Their accession numbers in the Galleria Palatina are: Inv. Poggio Imperiale n. 1225; Inv. OdA 1911 n. 561; Inv. OdA 1911 n. 498. This information can be found in: Chiarini, *Galerie*. 14-18.

⁸ Goldberg, *Patterns*. 38-9. The presence of a van Aelst painting in the collection of Ferdinando Cospi is especially compelling as he possessed one of Bologna's most significant *kunstkammers*. The collection was donated by Cospi to the city in 1657. The possible relationship between a collector like Cospi and a still life painter like van Aelst, whose work showed great awareness of the concepts central to the formation of *kunstkammers*, is particularly tantalizing. It is a subject I intend to explore at greater length in a future article. For further information on Cospi see Laura Laurencich-Minelli, "Museography and Ethnographic Collections in Bologna During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). 17-23; Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994). 26-31, 116-126, 390-391.

⁹ Raffaella Morselli, *Collezioni e quadriere nella Bologna del Seicento: Inventari 1640-1707, Documents for the History of Collecting: Italian Inventories 3* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Trust, 1998). The relevant inventories are numbers 34, 36, 59 and 74.

invaluable perspective on van Aelst's early approach towards his patrons. I will argue that although these paintings are remarkably different from his later Dutch production, the market philosophy they espouse is virtually identical. This chapter will therefore begin with a discussion of his distinctive Italian production in light of the expectations of his clients and the social and theoretical mood of the court. What we find is a clearly defined approach to the process of painting for patrons that van Aelst was to employ for the rest of his career. Accordingly, this discussion expands to consider his Amsterdam period paintings, and how they fit the model defined in Italy. An ideal means of approaching these issues would be to consider a number of Amsterdam collections as case studies in comparison to the Medici. The depth and complexity of the extant inventories, as well as the information available about them, however, does not readily support such an approach. Nor would this approach enable a synthetic, broadly applicable result. Consequently, I will instead define the techniques van Aelst adopted in order to please his clientele in Amsterdam, using examples from inventories where ever possible to determine the extent to which van Aelst maintained and deviated from the approach he adopted in Italy. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of originals and copies in the oeuvre of van Aelst. This discussion engages issues of market and collecting and lays the foundation for the final chapter on artistic virtuosity.

Italy and the Medici: Singing for His Supper

Perhaps one of the most crucial elements necessary for understanding the Medici court in Florence around the time of van Aelst's stay there was the great importance of what was deemed *toscanità*. Meaning literally, Tuscanness, this was the great esteem in which anything Tuscan, or anything that praised the Medici court, was held.¹⁰ This attitude is related to the definitive 1537 return to power of the Medici with the court of Cosimo de' Medici and their desire for legitimization as rulers of Tuscany. Equally related was the culture of experiment and innovation characteristic of the Medici court and later manifest in the 1657 founding of the scientific society, the *Accademia del Cimento*.¹¹ By support and encouragement of all things Tuscan, or things perceived as Tuscan, the Medici worked to carve out an identity for their court and to use their family's illustrious role in the Renaissance to legitimize and glorify their rule. The esteem of ideas, objects and people possessing *toscanità* was accompanied by an equally pronounced disdain for anything lacking *toscanità*.¹² In this environment a foreign artist like van Aelst would have been wise to extol the virtues cherished by the court.

¹⁰ Jay Tribby, "Dante's Restaurant: The Cultural Work of Experiment in Early Modern Tuscany," in *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text*, ed. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (London and New York: Routledge, 1995). 320, 326. The feudal, administrative and political ramifications of the reconstruction and Tuscan centralization under Cosimo de' Medici is carefully outlined in Elena Fasano Guarini, *Lo Stato Mediceo di Cosimo I* (Florence: G. C. Sansoni S.p.A., 1973).

¹¹ Tribby, "Dante's." 321-322. Hildebrecht, "Otto". 251. Tribby's other articles discuss the experimental culture at the Medici court, which is related but not crucial to understanding the work of van Aelst. Jay Tribby, "Club Medici: Natural Experiment and the Imagineering of Tuscany," *Configurations* 2, no. 2 (1994). Jay Tribby, "Cooking (with) Clio: Eloquence and Experiment in 17th Century Florence," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52 (1991). On this subject another excellent source is Findlen, *Possessing*.

¹² Tribby, "Dante's." 330.

The atmosphere present during the period in which van Aelst was in Florence was as much due to the personalities of the members of the Medici family as it was to the veneration of *toscanità*. Accordingly, in order to fully understand the complex environment in which van Aelst found himself, it is necessary to explore the personalities and collecting philosophies of his major patrons Cardinal Leopoldo and Cardinal Giovan Carlo.¹³

Cardinal Leopoldo, brother of Ferdinando II de' Medici, grand Duke of Tuscany, was a gifted supporter of the arts and sciences. He was the head of the above mentioned *Accademia del Cimento* when it was founded in 1657. He was also a talented amateur artist, having produced a small number of paintings, and sometimes embellishing his personal papers with drawings.¹⁴ Leopoldo was somewhat of an intellectual omnivore, showing interest in a great range of topics. Lorenzo Magalotti, the secretary of the *Accademia del Cimento* wrote of Leopoldo to one of his foreign book-buying agents, describing his interests in, among other things, "manuscript reports on the geography, customs and inhabitants of countries... in every part of the world... books of criticism,

¹³ Perhaps the most useful and recent source for understanding each of the brothers, particularly in light of their interests in still life painting and natural history is Marco Chiarini, *Il Giardino del Granduca: Natura morta nelle collezioni Medicee* (Torino: Seot, 1997). The classic source for understanding Cardinal Leopoldo's collecting is Silvia Meloni Trkulja, "Leopoldo de Medici Collezionista," *Source* 307 (1975). Important for understanding his collecting of drawings is the article in the same issue: Gloria Chiarini de Anna, "Leopoldo De' Medici e la sua raccolta di disegni nel 'Carteggio d'Artisti' dell'Archivio di Stato di Firenze," *Source* 307 (1975). On Cardinal Giovan Carlo's collecting see Silvia Mascalchi, "Giovan Carlo de' Medici: An Outstanding but Neglected Collector in Seventeenth-Century Florence," *Apollo* (1984). An early, perhaps overly colorful biography of Giovan Carlo can be found in Harold Acton, *The Last Medici* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1958). 47-50.

¹⁴ Goldberg, *Vasari*. 15-16.

gallantry, satire and curiosities.”¹⁵ He was an avid connoisseur and collector, showing great interest in classical antiquities.¹⁶ Moreover, the Uffizi’s collection of artists’ self-portraits was a project he began in 1664.¹⁷ Indeed, upon his death, he willed the majority of his tremendous collection to his nephew Cosimo III, who was to succeed Ferdinando II as Duke. The intent behind this bequest was that these objects were ultimately to be incorporated into the dynastic Medici holdings. Indeed, Leopoldo clearly understood the dynastic importance of expanding the exhibition space in the Uffizi and had already been engaged in the reorganization and decorative planning for the galleries before his death.¹⁸ It seems that Leopoldo was keenly aware of the importance of the perception and the legacy of his family and actively sought to enhance it through such projects.

This combination of great breadth of interest and intense awareness of dynastic responsibility sheds new light on the paintings that van Aelst created for Cardinal Leopoldo. One of these works is one of a pair, and depicts an array of elaborate and valuable vessels with an assortment of fruit and a peacock pie (figure 10). In addition to being a sumptuous still life, the painting is most notable because at least one of the objects it depicts is in the collection of the Museo degli Argenti (figure 72).¹⁹ This elaborate object, a double nautilus cup or “mesciroba,” was originally commissioned by Francesco I de’Medici (1547-1578), and is of Flemish manufacture, with shells of

¹⁵ This quotation, along with the impression of Leopoldo’s intellectual breadth is taken from: Eric Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries. 1527-1800: A History of Florence and the Florentines in the Age of the Grand Dukes* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1973). 232-234.

¹⁶ Goldberg, *Vasari*. 38-9. To get a further sense of the extent and detail of his collections see: Trkulja, “Leopoldo.” 20-21.

¹⁷ Goldberg, *Vasari*. 42. Goldberg, *Patterns*. 14.

¹⁸ Goldberg, *Patterns*. 231-232.

¹⁹ Chiarini, *Galerie*. 11.

oriental origin.²⁰ It combines some of the most striking evidence of nature's artistry with the virtuosic results of human artifice. The resulting object was of great value and judging from its prominent position in van Aelst's still life, was still greatly esteemed in the mid seventeenth-century. The gold or bronze lidded cup which dominates the composition is distinctive enough that it was most likely also an actual object, although it is unknown today. The same may also be said of the gold mounted rock crystal decanter. In depicting these specific objects, in particular the double nautilus cup originally commissioned by Francesco de' Medici, van Aelst exhibits his awareness of *toscanità*, reinforces the importance of the Medici dynasty and appeals to Leopoldo's sensibilities. In addition, the opulent nature of the objects is suitably reflected in the elegant arrangement and style of the still life van Aelst has created. It is likely that the complex and sumptuous composition appealed to the Leopoldo's taste and helped to make the painting suitable for the collection of a Medici Prince. Indeed, the effect must have been remarkable when it was paired with its striking pendant of fruit rendered in complementary blue and red tones and arranged in a corresponding pyramidal composition (Figure 46).

Another painting from Leopoldo's collection reveals van Aelst's attentiveness to the wishes and tastes of his patron is the large still life discussed in Chapter Two (Figure 15). This painting reproduces a nautilus cup that resembles a pair of such cups that are

²⁰ Marilena Mosco, ed., *Meraviglie: Precious, Rare and Curious Objects from the Medici Treasure* (Florence: Centro Di, 2003). 15, 39.

today in the collection of the Museo Degli Argenti.²¹ Both the cup and the large footed pitcher very likely allude to the famed workshops in the palace that housed artisans crafting similarly elaborate objects to glorify and enhance the Medici collections.²² The composition of the painting is also marked by a conspicuous spill of deep blue fabric, likely painted using the valuable pigment ultramarine.²³ The use of this pigment not only intimates the quality of the painting, but it is also likely a subtle reference to the collection of rare and valuable vessels carved out of lapis lazuli in the Medici collections (Figure 73). Largely acquired in the sixteenth-century, these precious vessels were the products of Medici workshops and patronage.²⁴ Van Aelst chose to allude to them, and thereby to the importance of Medici patronage, by painting the large velvet cloth using the deep, unmistakably rich tones of ultramarine. In addition, as noted in chapter two, the painting appeals to the sensibilities of a nobleman, depicting what would have been appropriate aristocratic pastimes, including music, hunting and collecting. In light of the omnivorous interests of Leopoldo, the painting seems all the more appropriate, as his breadth of learning would have allowed him to appreciate the painting for its appropriately sumptuous appearance and its allusions to his many talents. Moreover, the interconnected themes of the five senses and the four elements, which can quite easily be seen in this ambitious work, would have added yet another layer of appeal for the

²¹ Mosco, ed., *Meraviglie*. 38.

²² Goldberg, *Patterns*. 7.

²³ A discussion of van Aelst's use of ultramarine can be found in Bergström, "Wonderful." And in Loeff, "Zoek."

²⁴ Further information on these vessels can be found in C. Willemijn Fock, "Vases en Lapis-Lazuli des Collections Médicéennes du seizième siècle," *Münchener Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst* 3, no. 27 (1976).; Marilena Mosco and Ornella Casazza, *The Museo degli Argenti: Collections and Collectors* (Florence: Giunti, 2004).

Prince.²⁵ In this light, the painting becomes a reflection and a compliment to the identity of Leopoldo, to his learning, to his refinement and to his accomplishments. Van Aelst appeals not only to his breadth of interest in this painting, but also to his great awareness of his dynastic responsibility.

Cardinal Giovan Carlo de' Medici, unlike his brother Leopoldo, did not have as great a sense of obligation to the Medici dynasty. He was every bit as cultivated and educated as his brother, but seemed to eschew the obligations his family name imposed upon him. The historian Galluzzi spoke of his unwillingness to subordinate "his spirit to the yoke of a false appearance and an affected regularity of manners."²⁶ For instance, in 1638, Giovan Carlo was appointed Generalissimo de' Mari di Spagna, but he gave up the position just four years later in 1642.²⁷ This marked distance from his family and its obligations is highlighted by the anomalous and inexplicable sale of his collections that occurred after his death between 1663 and 1664. Although the Cardinal's estate was in dire financial straits, the benefits of dispersing such a remarkable collection instead of incorporating it into the Medici family collections would have been fairly limited and remains difficult to understand.²⁸

In which directions did Giovan Carlo's interests lay, then? As the second eldest brother and possible successor to his older brother Ferdinando II, he received a

²⁵ These themes are discussed in chapter two, pp. 79-81.

²⁶ The reference to this passage can be found in Mascalchi, "Giovan Carlo." 268. The original text is found in Riguccio Galluzzi, *Storia del Granducato di Toscana*, vol. 7 (Florence: Presso Leonardo Marchini, 1822). 310-311. In Italian, this passage reads: "il suo spirito al giogo di una simulate apparenza ed una affettata regolarità di costume."

²⁷ Mascalchi, "Giovan Carlo." 270.

²⁸ Mascalchi, "Giovan Carlo." 268.

comprehensive education and was made to assist his brother from an early age. Study of Giovan Carlo reveals, however, that his primary interests lay not in dynastic, political and diplomatic matters, but in cultivated, intellectual discussions, collecting works of art, assembling an admirable library, supporting the theater and pursuing the study of botany and horticulture.²⁹ Giovan Carlo was also a notable patron of artists, supporting painters including Giovanna Garzoni, Salvator Rosa, and Pietro da Cortona. The Medici patronage of horticulture noted above was not unique to Giovan Carlo, indeed, Europe's first botanical garden was founded in Pisa between 1543 and 1544, and supported with funds provided by Cosimo I.³⁰ Nevertheless, Giovan Carlo's devotion to the study was notable. He went to great lengths to collect rare flowers from across the globe, and created a drawing room in the left wing of the Pitti Palace decorated *a scagliola* and known as the *Paradiso dei Fiori* (Paradise of Flowers).³¹

The collecting of works of art and the decoration of his palaces was also a pastime of Giovan Carlo's about which much is known. He began his first collection of paintings in the Palazzo of Mezzomonte, a property he purchased in 1629 as a private residence. This collection grew to some 250 paintings. Later, his brother the Grand Duke gave him the Casino in the Via della Scala, a residence more suited to diplomatic responsibilities and one known for its garden.³² Giovan Carlo transferred his collections to his new

²⁹ Mascalchi, "Giovan Carlo." 268-269; Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi and Gretchen A. Hirschauer, *The Flowering of Florence: Botanical Art for the Medici* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2002). 76.

³⁰ Tomasi and Hirschauer, *Flowering*. 32.

³¹ Tomasi and Hirschauer, *Flowering*. 76. *A scagliola* was a technique using colored plaster of paris that was intended to look like *pietre dure*.

³² Mascalchi, "Giovan Carlo." 270.

residence and in 1644 sold the Palazzo di Mezzomonte. Shortly thereafter, in about 1650, he received the Villa di Castello after the death of Prince Don Lorenzo de' Medici.³³ It was at this moment, when he is faced with two residences, that the careful division and organization of his continually growing collection truly becomes clear. The Casino in Via della Scala became the home of the most refined objects in his collection, as well as his newest acquisitions, while the Villa di Castello contained still lifes, landscapes, and the work of contemporary Florentine painters.³⁴ This subdivision is significant because it signals a sophisticated awareness on the part of Giovan Carlo of distinctions of taste. He was able to determine which objects would have been judged the finest by discerning connoisseurs and which objects he valued for less tangible reasons. Indeed, the inventory of the Villa di Castello made after his death reveals that three pictures by van Aelst hung in the Cardinal's private chambers, suggesting some personal appeal the paintings may have held.³⁵ Upon his death and the dispersal of his collections, he owned over 570 paintings.³⁶

The collection of Cardinal Giovan Carlo contained at least seven paintings by Willem van Aelst. The group contained three pairs of paintings, two of which are still complete today, of the third pair only one painting remains. One of these pairs provides insight into van Aelst's approach to painting for Cardinal Giovan Carlo.

³³ Mascalchi, "Giovan Carlo." 271.

³⁴ Mascalchi, "Giovan Carlo." 271.

³⁵ The reference to the original inventory is ASF Miscellanea medicea 31, ins. 10, 5r

³⁶ Mascalchi, "Giovan Carlo." 268.

The 1652 pendants that van Aelst painted for Giovan Carlo depict an array of fruits, precious vessels and flowers in jewel-like tones of blue, red, green and buttery orange (Figures 13 & 14). Both paintings are vertical in format and have strong pyramidal compositions that complement one another formally. The paintings were among three works by van Aelst that hung in the Cardinal's private chambers. In the inventory they are listed in together and it is likely that they hung as a pair. Other paintings in the private chamber included works by Tintoretto, Veronese and Correggio.³⁷ Both of the paintings by van Aelst address the interests and sensibilities of Cardinal Giovan Carlo in distinct and subtle ways, operating both as a pair and independently.

The fruit piece with precious glassware (Figure 13) is an impressive and visually stunning work that operates on multiple levels, simultaneously appealing to Giovan Carlo's interests in collecting, his patronage of artists and his pursuit of botany. That Giovan Carlo was a great collector of paintings is undisputed, but his collecting interests also lay in other directions. Upon the sale of Giovan Carlo's collection, in addition to the extensive painting and fine furniture, there was also a selection of Murano glass.³⁸ Although the tall, lidded vase in the painting has been referred to as crystal and not glass,

³⁷ The inventory of the Villa di Castello made after his death indicates that the paintings by van Aelst in Giovan Carlo's collection seem to have been hung in groups. This suggests that other pendant paintings likely also hung together. There were four paintings by van Aelst in the *salone maggiore* on the ground floor (two of which are identifiable as numbers 23 and 24 in Appendix) in addition to the three that hung in the Cardinal's private chambers. The original inventory is ASF, Miscellanea medicea 31, ins. 10, inv. 1663 3v. and 5r. The inventory information is cited in Chiarini, *Giardino*. 131-132, however I am using the page numbers found in pencil on the original document, which differ from those cited in the above source.

³⁸ Mascalchi, "Giovan Carlo." 268.

the object could easily be either.³⁹ As in the paintings van Aelst made for Leopoldo, it is possible that van Aelst depicted a real glass in Giovan Carlo's collection. The same may also be said of the gilt shell-form vessel elegantly framed by the leaves of the melon. On this basic level, the painting appealed to Giovan Carlo's interests as a collector, although it is not clear whether the objects depicted are actual portraits, as in the work van Aelst did for Leopoldo.⁴⁰ The painting also functions on a more sophisticated plane, however, and it is to this that I would like to turn.

Just before the arrival of Willem van Aelst in Florence around 1652, the notable Italian painter, Giovanna Garzoni, drew to a close her nine-year stay in Florence (1642-1651). The evidence of her labors, which range between botanical illustrations and still lifes, must have still been visible at the court for van Aelst to see. Her careful description, influenced by the work of Northern artists like Albrecht Dürer, Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder and Balthasar van der Ast, was greatly sought after by many members of the Medici court in Florence, and Giovan Carlo was one of the most enthusiastic.⁴¹ Although it is unclear whether it was executed for the Medici, a gouache painting by Garzoni depicting a squash bears consideration (Figure 74).⁴² This would be a relatively

³⁹ Chiarini, *Giardino*. 128. The titles are not consistent in the Italian publications. The ones I have chosen to use are found in the comprehensive 1989 catalog of Dutch paintings in Florence. Chiarini, *Galerie*. 1-21.

⁴⁰ I would argue that it is not necessary to have such a direct relationship, which seems to be rather the exception than the rule. Instead, these paintings seem to mirror back an ideal world that suggests a particular taste and a set of values that a patron or potential buyer possesses. Julie Berger Hochstrasser discusses this very subject, as does Mariët Westermann. See: Hochstrasser, "Imag(in)ing." Mariët Westermann, "Costly and curious, Full off pleasure and home contentment' Making Home in the Dutch Republic," in *Art and Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt*, ed. Marlene Chambers and Mariët Westermann (Zwolle: Waanders, 2001).

⁴¹ Tomasi and Hirschauer, *Flowering*. 81.

⁴² Tomasi and Hirschauer, *Flowering*. 86.

unremarkable coincidence had not Bartolomeo Bimbi, a favorite artist of Cosimo III, depicted a squash from the royal gardens of Pisa some fifty years later (Figure 75). This monstrous squash, Bimbi's *cartellino* conveniently informs us, weighed 160 pounds and was "born in Pisa in the Garden known as San Francesco [belonging to] His Royal Highness" in the year 1711.⁴³ Though long after the time of van Aelst or Garzoni at the Medici Court, Bimbi's picture, like Garzoni's suggests that the Ducal gardens very likely provided subject matter for paintings as well as rare specimens for study. Van Aelst's melon, a vegetable notably absent from his Amsterdam production, most likely came from the Medici gardens. To paint such a melon would have been an exhibition of an appropriate esteem of *toscanità*. At very least, much as in the example of the glassware in this painting, the presence of the melon, so prominent and so lusciously arrayed, alluded to the horticultural pursuits of his patron.

The second painting of the pair is somewhat more straightforward, but reveals van Aelst deviating from his standard repertoire in order to suit the particular interests of Giovan Carlo. Chiefly, in this instance, this painting appeals to his interest in botany and his own personal collection of plants, (Figure 14) which included rare plants from all over the world, with a particularly large collection of anemones.⁴⁴ In this respect, van Aelst's flower piece is highly appropriate to the Cardinal. In particular, what is notable in the bouquet van Aelst depicts, is the presence of at least two different types of anemones. Not only are anemones rare in van Aelst's repertoire, but this is also the last appearance

⁴³ Tomasi and Hirschauer, *Flowering*. 99-100.

⁴⁴ Tomasi and Hirschauer, *Flowering*. 76.

of anemones in his flower paintings.⁴⁵ Additionally, the painting also contains other rare flowers for van Aelst, including the delicate bowed stems of the fritillaria, which only appears in this painting. The implication of the presence of these blooms in van Aelst's still life is that the painting is tailored precisely for the botanical collection and the interests of Giovan Carlo. In addition, van Aelst also combines for the first time in his oeuvre the motif of the pocket watch (only the second occurrence of this motif in his oeuvre) with his bouquet of rare flowers. Perhaps this combination is a subtle allusion to Giovan Carlo that his depiction of the Cardinal's flowers will long outlast the natural blooms, thus beating time and slyly implying the superiority of his painting.⁴⁶

As with the paintings van Aelst created for Leopoldo, this pair for Giovan Carlo illustrates the degree to which he modified his standard repertoire to produce a painting uniquely tailored to his patron. In this pair he alludes subtly to the Cardinal's patronage, his collecting and his interest in botany.

In the preceding discussions I have written about van Aelst's deliberate inclusions, adjustments and modifications of his traditional subject matter. However I am keenly aware of the fact that the degree of input from the Medici themselves remains an unknown influence. Unfortunately, the existing documents regarding van Aelst remain frustratingly mute in this area. In her discussion of the experimental method of Francesco

⁴⁵ The only other flower piece in which van Aelst depicts anemones is in the 1651 painting in the collection of the Musée des Beaux Arts in Caen. Figure 8, and number 16 in appendix. It has been suggested that the Caen painting was painted for Giovan Carlo, but the Antwerp panel mark, and the painting's date, makes that unlikely. Chiarini, *Giardino*. 128-9.

⁴⁶ This is a fairly standard interpretation, however it is significant here because this is the first instance of this combination of watch and flowers in van Aelst's oeuvre, signaling a degree of intention.

Redi, Paula Findlen astutely parses the role that patronage played in directing Redi's experiments at the Medici Court.⁴⁷ What she ultimately describes, is that Redi's work and writings suggest his ultimate control of his experiments. However ironically, in order to remain of interest and to please the court, he needed to precisely tailor his experiments, and the manner in which he presented them. Therefore, the scientist who purported to have complete control of his experimental method, was in fact manipulated quite directly by the demands of working in the environment of the court.⁴⁸ Although the results and techniques were obviously quite different, I would suggest that van Aelst's relationship with his patrons might also be regarded in this manner. His modifications of his work may or may not have been his own innovations, however they were ultimately shaped by his environment and the desires of his patrons. This does not diminish van Aelst's inventiveness, it suggests, merely that he had learned how to please his clients with paintings that appealed to their own particular interests.

That he had learned this lesson well is borne out by the group of van Aelst's paintings that can be found in Bolognese inventories.⁴⁹ As they present a rather

⁴⁷ Paula Findlen, "Controlling the Experiment: Rhetoric, Court Patronage and the Experimental Method of Francesco Redi," *History of Science* 31 (1993).

⁴⁸ Findlen, "Controlling," 57-59.

⁴⁹ These inventories can be found in the third volume of Italian inventories in the excellent series produced by the Project for the Study of Collecting and Provenance at the Getty Research Institute. They are also available online in a slightly different format. For the book see Morselli, *Collezioni*. Since there are fourteen paintings that are undoubtedly by van Aelst, and eight which are questionable, as well as ten statues that are extremely questionable, I will consider only the fourteen paintings which are definitely ascribed to van Aelst. In this manner I hope to attain the clearest picture of the sort of subject matter he was including in his paintings, none of which can be traced, unfortunately. For a sketch of the Bolognese art market at the time of van Aelst's stay in Italy and a better understanding of the conditions that encouraged interest in his work see Adelina Modesti, "Patrons as Agents and Artists as Dealers in Seicento Bologna," in *The Art Market in Italy 15th - 17th Centuries*, ed. Marcello Fantoni, Louisa C. Matthews, and Sara F. Matthews-Grieco (Ferrara: Franco Cosimo Panini, 2003).

anomalous picture, I will not go into great detail in my discussions of these inventories. Nevertheless, the descriptions of paintings found there provide an important window on the sort of paintings van Aelst was creating for his Bolognese clientele.

The fourteen paintings which are undoubtedly ascribed to van Aelst in the Bolognese inventories are scattered between the collections of four citizens: the doctor Andrea Danesi owned four; the banker Giacomo Maria Marchesini owned two; the merchant Simone Tassi owned one; and the nobleman banker Giovanni Francesco Davia owned an impressive seven paintings.

Andrea Danesi's inventory was drawn up in 1680 and contained one hundred and two items.⁵⁰ The inventory included paintings, drawings and sculptures by artists from Bologna, Venice, Germany and the Netherlands. The total value of the inventory was approximately two thousand lire.⁵¹ The four paintings by van Aelst in this inventory appear to be two sets of pendants, one set being described as "*grandi*". Unfortunately, the entries on Danesi's van Aelsts are not particularly revealing. They are described as: "*Duoi quadri d'animali di Monsù Gulielmo 40*" and "*Duoi quadri d'animali grandi di Monsù Guliel.o 40.*"⁵² What we can determine from this inventory is that the pendant format, which van Aelst also used in his production for the Medici, must have also had some popularity in Bologna. With very few exceptions, he discontinued this practice when he returned to the Netherlands. The price of 40 lire for each pair is low to average in the range of valuations provided in the inventory.

⁵⁰ Morselli, *Collezioni*. 187-191.

⁵¹ Morselli, *Collezioni*. 187.

⁵² Morselli, *Collezioni*. 190.

The banker Giacomo Maria Marchesini owned two van Aelst paintings. His inventory contained some one hundred forty works, including paintings, drawings, prints and sculpture. The inventory was drawn up in 1685.⁵³ The two paintings by van Aelst receive somewhat more description than in the Danesi inventory, and are listed in one entry, but do not appear to be a pair. The entry reads as follows: “*Due quadri con diversi animali, cioe uno più grande dell’altro con cornice dorate, di mano di Monsù Guglielmo L100*”.⁵⁴ Once again the pictures depict animals, although we only know that there are several or *diversi*. What sort of animals, or whether they are alive or dead, we do not know. The paintings are of different sizes, one larger than the other, and that they are in gold frames. The value of the two works, 100 lire, is middling in the range of prices given in the inventory, and certainly higher than the 40 lire per pair that was found in the Danesi inventory.

The inventory of the merchant Simone Tassi was drawn up in 1671, and contains sixty-six paintings. They are representative of sixteenth-century Italian painting, although some the work of some foreign artists is also present.⁵⁵ The single painting by van Aelst in the inventory differs in subject matter from the animal paintings we observed in the previous inventories, although its description is also not exceptionally revealing. The entry reads as follows: “*Quadro grande di frutta di Monsù Gulielmo con Cornice Bianca L 80*”.⁵⁶ The painting in this inventory is a depiction of fruit, and is described as large in

⁵³ Morselli, *Collezioni*. 336-346.

⁵⁴ Morselli, *Collezioni*. 342.

⁵⁵ Morselli, *Collezioni*. 416-421.

⁵⁶ Morselli, *Collezioni*. 419.

scale, although no measurements are given. The frame in this instance is interesting, although inconclusive, being described as *Bianca*, which may mean white or clean.

The final Bolognese inventory which we will consider contains seven van Aelst paintings and is the most revealing of the inventories. The number of paintings suggests a sustained interest in van Aelst and their disposition and subject matter reveal a great deal about the preferences of the collector and the perception of van Aelst's paintings.

Giovanni Francesco Davia's collection is the most opulent of the four considered here, containing over one hundred works, all carefully described, with some paintings valued as high as 600 lire. Artists include Guido Reni, Ludovico Caracci, Guercino, and Domenichino.⁵⁷ The paintings by van Aelst include a single work, one pair, and a group of four paintings. The single work is described as follows: "*Un quadro grande con cornice oro e nero con dentro Animali di varie sorti, cioè Galli, Galline, una lepre et altro di mano di Monsù Guglielmo L. 90.*"⁵⁸ The painting is therefore framed in a gold and black frame and depicts animals of various sorts, including hens and roosters, and a young rabbit. The subject matter of this painting is fairly standard for van Aelst's repertoire at this time; the same animals reoccur throughout his work even in Amsterdam, especially the hens and roosters. The value is fairly high, although does not compare to some of the higher valuations in the inventory of 300-750 lire. The pair of van Aelsts are described as follows: "*Due quadri compagni con cornice dorata liscia con dentro in uno diversi pesci, e nell'altro animali penuti, cioè Galline Annatre, et altro di mano di Monsù*

⁵⁷ Morselli, *Collezioni*. 195-206.

⁵⁸ Morselli, *Collezioni*. 205.

*Guglielmo L 150.*⁵⁹ The paintings are framed in smooth gold frames and are explicitly described as a pair. They depict an assortment of fish, and in the other feathered animals including chickens and ducks. The pair appears to represent the theme of the elements water and air. In this respect the paintings relate to some of the work van Aelst did for the Medici, although this kind of thematic work did not continue in his Amsterdam production. The final group of four pictures is the most revealing and is described as follows: “*Quattro quadri grandi sopraporte compagni con cornice oro, e Tartaruca, in uno Animali, cioè Anatre et altro, in un’altro robbe mangiative di Zuccaro, nell’altro Pavoni, e nell’altro Pesci, e frutti di mano di Monsù Guglielmo L 300.*” The four paintings described in this entry are large, framed in gold and tortoise shell and depict “in one animals, namely a duck and others, in another edible things like squash, in another one a peacock, and in the other fish and fruit...”⁶⁰ The contents of the paintings suggest the makings of a sumptuous banquet, fowl such as duck and peacock, fruits and vegetables and an assortment of fish. In addition, the animals and fruits might represent the elements earth, air and water, although fire is absent from the descriptions. Because these subjects, except for the fruit and fish, are wholly absent from van Aelst’s later Amsterdam production, they suggest a deliberate adaptation to the demands of this particular patron as well as the Bolognese market. The description also provides further information on the role of these paintings in the décor of Davia’s apartments. The paintings are described as large, and are framed in gold and tortoise shell, framing

⁵⁹ Morselli, *Collezioni*. 205.

⁶⁰ Morselli, *Collezioni*. 203.

materials that are not inconsequential. Because they are described as a set “*compagni*” it is not unreasonable to also assume that the frames were a matching set. The final information this entry yields up is the fact that the paintings are described as “*sopraporte*” or overdoor paintings. The elegant matching frames, the coordinating subjects and the planned installation suggest a commission from Davia to van Aelst, a sign that his work was not only purchased as a novelty but actively sought out. Indeed, in the case of Giovanni Francesco Davia, who owned seven of his paintings, we may also consider him a collector of van Aelst’s work. Furthermore, the appellation of overdoor suggests not only a decorative function, but a thematic linkage, implying a level of compositional and conceptual complexity that appears more subtly in his Amsterdam production.

The ability to adapt himself, chameleon-like to different patrons and commissions was clearly a skill that van Aelst learned while abroad. His education in the subject began with his initial interaction with the painter and dealer Jean-Michel Picart and continued with his work for both Leopoldo and Giovan Carlo de’ Medici as well as other Italian patrons. His work changes dramatically in terms of subject matter, scale and theme. These changes satisfy not only the demands of his patrons, but are also designed to appeal to and reflect the better qualities of his patrons. He accomplishes this through the inclusion of not only references to the public roles of his patrons, but also objects that the patron owns or covets, references to pastimes and the character of his patrons as well as specific adaptations to fit each (presumable) commission. This ability to accommodate

the wishes and needs of his clients would prove immensely instrumental in his career and subsequent success in Amsterdam. The means through which van Aelst appealed to and adapted his work to fit the Amsterdam clientele is much indebted to his experience abroad. Nevertheless, the Amsterdam market differed markedly from its Italian counterpart. Consequently the approaches and innovations van Aelst developed changed subtly and effectively to fit the needs of his new clientele. The subsequent discussion will examine which elements of his foreign training remained and which were abandoned in favor of newer, more effective methods.

Amsterdam and Beyond: New Clients and New Approaches

Van Aelst's return to Amsterdam presented him with an entirely different situation from that he encountered in Florence, where his patrons were prominent members of the cultivated Medici family with clearly defined interests and preferences. Not only did the potential buyers of his paintings in Amsterdam make up a broader and less differentiated market, their individual interests and pastimes, things which had been writ large for the Medici, were not as clearly defined. Perhaps even more pronounced than with the paintings van Aelst made while he was abroad, his production in Amsterdam is difficult to pin down to specific collectors. It is possible to place his paintings in a small number of contemporary collections, but the knowledge of whether these owners could be classed as active collectors of his work, deliberate patrons or

simply casual buyers, once again remains frustratingly inaccessible. This absence of specific and consistent individual patronage meant that van Aelst was not able to tailor his paintings to particular patrons in precisely the manner that he had in Italy. To his advantage, however, was the fact that the art market in Amsterdam at the time of van Aelst's return was on the verge of peaking, with demand for paintings at an all time high.⁶¹ Indeed, the numbers of still life paintings present in Amsterdam inventories across the seventeenth-century reveals a corresponding upward momentum, with the percentage of still lifes reaching their peak between the years 1660-1669.⁶² Van Aelst unwittingly timed his return for precisely the moment when his paintings had the potential to be most well received. This Amsterdam culture of collecting, reflected to some degree throughout the United Provinces, which embraced not only paintings, but also books, other art objects and naturalia, served to benefit the newly returned painter.⁶³

Yet, despite the purportedly positive nature of such an environment, patronage in the United Provinces differed markedly from the environment which van Aelst left in the south. Because of the policies of the Dutch Reformed Church, artists could not rely on religious institutions for a steady stream of commissions as they could in Italy. The Stadhouder's Court in The Hague, particularly the court of Frederik Hendrik, with the advice and guidance of Constantijn Huygens, did indeed commission work from artists.

⁶¹ Montias, "Works of Art." 349; Montias, "Random." 84.

⁶² Montias, "Works of Art." 352-353; Montias, "Random." 82.

⁶³ The number of sources on the history of collecting is vast. Some of the most useful and significant ones, particularly in relation to painting and still lifes include Bergvelt and Kistemaker, eds., *Wereld.*; Scheurleer, "Early."; Bok, "Vraag", Kenseth, ed., *Marvelous.*; Wheelock, *Collector's.*; Sluijter, "All Striving."; Montias, "Competing.", Schama, "Perishable."

The official court taste however tended towards Flemish art in the grand tradition of Rubens, van Dyck and Jordaens.⁶⁴ Certainly still life painting was not an esteemed genre of painting in official court circles or in Dutch art theoretical literature unless it was highly allegorical or documentary, such as the work of Albert Eckhout (c. 1607-1665).⁶⁵ Artists might also garner commissions from regents or governors of charitable institutions as well as guilds and militia companies. Such commissions could include group portraits and allegorical scenes or sculptural and decorative work for new buildings.⁶⁶ Once again, it becomes apparent that still life paintings were generally not subject to public commission.⁶⁷ Van Aelst's audience, therefore, were private citizens, and given the popularity of picture collecting, his patrons could theoretically belong to a remarkably broad socioeconomic spectrum. Logically, the greater the social and financial standing of the patron or buyer of his work was, the higher the price and the greater the notoriety for van Aelst. Even a cursory appraisal of his oeuvre upon his return to Amsterdam reveals that van Aelst's work was deliberately geared towards this more elite market.

A number of qualities of van Aelst's work communicate this elite bias. These qualities are manifest not only in the objects van Aelst chose to depict, but in the manner in which he depicted them. We can see that he contrived his paintings to appeal to a

⁶⁴ Bob Haak, *The Golden Age: Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1996). 40.

⁶⁵ Eckhout was one of six artists sent to Brazil by Johan Maurits. His colorful still lifes with tropical fruits record some of the flora encountered there. Hochstrasser, *Trade*. 194.

⁶⁶ Haak, *Golden*. 52-57.

⁶⁷ One of the few exceptions being the illusionistic still life painted by Cornelis Brize in 1656 for the Bankruptcy Chamber of the New Amsterdam Town Hall

number of broad aspects of elite culture. First, he addressed the popularity of collecting not only paintings but naturalia as well. Second, his paintings resonate with exclusively elite pastimes such as hunting while simultaneously appealing to an appreciation of quality and fine materials. Finally, they echo the intellectual pursuits of the upper classes. Remarkably, although the result is a strikingly different group of paintings, the approach that van Aelst took was surprisingly similar to the one he used in Florence. The only difference lay in the apparent inability to appeal to specific qualities and interests of individual patrons.⁶⁸ Accordingly, his Amsterdam work took on a more standardized quality. While the paintings he made for the Medici are unique within his oeuvre, the work he produced in Amsterdam, after approximately the mid-1660's can be clearly divided into standard types, characterized by controlled variations within set themes.⁶⁹ This fits the model of increased specialization present in the Dutch Republic at the time and suggests that the production of these types filled a regular demand within the larger genre of still life painting.

My analysis of van Aelst's Amsterdam patronage draws on information gathered from a number of Amsterdam inventories known to contain paintings by van Aelst.⁷⁰ Not

⁶⁸ It is indeed possible that van Aelst was appealing to his Patrons' specific qualities, as he did with the Medici, however lacking more precise information, such conclusions are difficult to make.

⁶⁹ Discussion above in Chapter three, as well as below in the second half of the current chapter, addresses this assertion more fully.

⁷⁰ The references to these inventories were drawn from a range of sources, however in each instance the original document has been consulted. This was done in order to access illuminating contextual information that might become evident through a more complete study. Accordingly, almost all of the aspects of van Aelst's work discussed below are supported by some corresponding information gleaned from the inventories. The discussions of particular patrons and inventories on which this section is based are all drawn from published or known inventories that contain van Aelst's work. These can be found in Bredius, *Künstler.*; Bredius, "Archiefsprokkelingen." Hoet, *Catalogus.*; Inventories were also found in the databases

surprisingly, such a study reveals that the identifiable owners of van Aelst's paintings were predominantly wealthy individuals. Although I would argue that this was van Aelst's target audience, it is important to note that it was usually only wealthier inventories that were carefully itemized with painters and subjects of paintings specified. The unequal representation of wealthy inventories is due mainly to the nature of the data analyzed.⁷¹

Examination of van Aelst's oeuvre upon his return to Amsterdam reveals three overarching qualities that occur in almost all of his paintings and that would have made his work more appealing to wealthy collectors. These include the use of the fine style, something already present in his work in France and Italy; the use of ultramarine, the expensive and dazzling blue pigment derived from lapis lazuli that is so frequently encountered in his work, and finally the introduction and consistent use of an Italianate signature. All three of these elements would have appealed to a collector's sense of quality and added to the prestige of van Aelst's paintings.

available online through the Project for the Study of Collecting and Provenance at the Getty Research Institute. Inventories were also found in searching the Montias Inventory Database that can be accessed at the Frick reference library in New York. In addition, I also consulted Scheurleer, Fock, and Dissel, *Rapenburg*, but found no inventories contemporary to van Aelst.

⁷¹ John Michael Montias himself frequently noted this frustrating paradox. For instance see Montias, "Random." 68. The most fascinating inventories to study in terms of research on the work of individual artists often belonged to the very wealthy because they contain the most information. Accordingly, this makes a broad inquiry specific to particular painters across socio-economic distinctions virtually impossible.

The Fine Style

Certainly the most evident of the three qualities noted above is van Aelst's consistent use of the fine style. As prior discussions have recounted, van Aelst's paintings are marvels of careful glazing and smooth description. The resulting work is highly representational, with flawless, invisible brushwork. His use of such fine finish began during his period of work in France. Prior to this point his painting style was fine but not polished to the degree of perfection that it was to later achieve. It seems likely that his encounter with French taste during the 1640's, facilitated by his work with Jean-Michel Picart, would have encouraged his use of a highly finished style.⁷² That van Aelst continued to paint in a remarkably fine style would not be noteworthy in itself had the fine style not been so highly esteemed in the Netherlands. In Northern art literature the praise for fine brushwork began as early as Karel van Mander, who extolled its virtues in his 1604 treatise on painting.⁷³ This sentiment was later echoed by Philips Angel in his 1641 speech.⁷⁴ Indeed, Angel specifically and directly praises the work of the Leiden fine painter Gerrit Dou above all others.⁷⁵ Dou famously was to achieve remarkably high prices for his paintings as was his closest follower Frans van Mieris.⁷⁶ That van Aelst

⁷² See beginning of present chapter for further discussion of Picart.

⁷³ Mander, *Grondt*. 258.

⁷⁴ Angel, "Praise."

⁷⁵ Angel, "Praise." 248.

⁷⁶ Gerrit Dou was paid 1000 guilders annually by Pieter Spiering, the minister to The Hague from Sweden, solely for the right of first refusal on his pictures. Slive, *Dutch*. 102. Dou, van Mieris and the other Leiden fine painters have been the subject of exhibitions and much scholarly attention. This began early in the 1980's with Otto Naumann, *Frans van Mieris*, 2 vols. (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1981). Following this early publication were two subsequent exhibitions on the subject Eric Jan Sluiter, Marlies Enklaar, and Paul Nieuwenhuizen, *Leidse Fijnschilders: Van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge 1630-1760* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1988). Hecht, *Hollandse*. More recently, a series of monographic exhibitions have explored the

adopted and chose to continue with the fine style is not surprising in view of the great popularity of fine painting, and the high prices it commanded. Facts like these would not have been lost on an ambitious young artist attempting to establish his career in Amsterdam. Moreover, the highly polished technique enabled van Aelst to display his dazzling mimetic skill, creating paintings that were remarkable statements of consummate virtuosity.

The Italian Signature

The Italianate signature which van Aelst adopted in 1659, “*Guill^{mo} van Aelst*,” was another consciously affected and consistent element in his paintings from that date onward that would have added to their appeal to potential buyers. Although it was not nearly as widespread as the collection of contemporary Netherlandish painting, there was a distinctive group of specialist patrons who sought out and collected Italian art.⁷⁷ These collectors tended to have some association with Italy, usually in the form of a trip that acted as a catalyst for their collecting.⁷⁸ However, such travel to Italy was by no means a guarantee that an individual would begin collecting Italian art. Amsterdam collectors who had some collections of Italian pictures included Jan Six, Balthasar Coymans and Jan and Gerard Reynst. All were collectors of the highest wealth and standing and all had some

individual personalities of these artists Ronni Baer, Arthur K. Wheelock, and Annetje Boersma, *Gerrit Dou 1613-1675: Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). Quentin Buvelot, *Frans van Mieris 1635-1681* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2005).

⁷⁷ Veen, "Uitzonderlijke."

⁷⁸ Veen, "Uitzonderlijke." 102-104. For further information on the nature of such travels and the individuals who embarked upon them see Westrienen, *Groote*.

formal connection with Italy. Jan Six had traveled there in 1640-41, Balthasar Coymans was originally a Flemish merchant with ties to Italy who eventually settled in Amsterdam, and famously, portions of the Reynst collection of Italian pictures were ultimately sold to the States of Holland to be presented to Charles II as part of the famed “Dutch Gift”.⁷⁹

That van Aelst chose to use the Italian form of his first name only after his return to the Netherlands suggests not only personal affinity but also an awareness of the potentially lucrative nature of his travels and an understandable desire to advertise his connection with Italy. The exclusive market of collectors that this kind of association would have afforded him access to clearly encouraged his active self-fashioning. The importance of this Italian connection to van Aelst is underscored by his contact with Cosimo III de Medici during his visit to the Netherlands in December and January of 1667-1668.⁸⁰ Moreover, in May 1672, van Aelst agreed, along with a group of other painters, to judge the quality of a group of Italian paintings the dealer Gerrit Uylenburgh was attempting to sell to the Great Elector in Berlin.⁸¹ Van Aelst’s involvement in this matter suggests that his attempts to identify himself with Italian art were meeting with success.

Van Aelst’s use of the Italianate signature also apparently attracted the attention of two Amsterdam collectors. Neither of these collectors had substantial collections of Italian pictures, however both appear to have traveled to Italy. It seems that van Aelst

⁷⁹ Veen, "Uitzonderlijke." 104. Logan, *Cabinet*.

⁸⁰ Hoogewerff, *Reizen*. 63-66. For my discussion of this event see chapter two.

⁸¹ Bredius, "Italiaansche." 42. SAA 5075, NAA 4074 ff. 367r.-367v.

may have appealed to precisely this niche collector who was eager to recollect his Italian sojourn but either too conservative or unwilling to pay the high prices required to amass a collection of Italian pictures.⁸²

Antonio Daems, whose inventory was drawn up upon his death in 1706, left behind a substantial household, complete with a large collection of paintings, a fashionably adorned gold leather room and a large library among his many valuables.⁸³ The inventory lacks valuations, so the painting by van Aelst is listed simply as *Een Fruitschael door van Aelst* (a fruit dish by van Aelst).⁸⁴ In the description of the same room (the *Binne Kamer* or inner chamber) where van Aelst's painting hung, there was also *Een schilderij vorbeeldende een Italianse pallijs gedaen door Giacomo Tadeo* (a painting depicting an Italian palace done by Giacomo Tadeo).⁸⁵ Moreover the inventory also contains paintings by other artists who had traveled to and worked in Italy, including two works by Otto Marseus van Schrieck.⁸⁶ Perhaps most interesting in this context is the presence in the inventory of Daems' library of a number of travel books including a book described as *Reisen door Frankrijk en Italie* (travels through France and Italy).⁸⁷

Although this book does not confirm that Daems did indeed travel to Italy, its presence in

⁸² A study of documents surrounding the collection of the Deutz brothers, who traveled to Italy and had a substantial collection of Italian pictures reveals a strong level of interests in Dutch Italianate artists. Although the brothers had Italian pictures, their equally strong collection of paintings by Netherlandish artists associated with Italy suggests that an interest in the collecting of such related works seems to have been triggered by their travel. Bikker, "Deutz."

⁸³ SAA 5075, NAA 6604, ff. 337-390. Daem's inventory of paintings is also available in the online databases provided by the Project for the Study of Collecting and Provenance at the Getty Research Institute as Archival Document N-420 (Daems).

⁸⁴ SAA 5075, NAA 6604, f 340.

⁸⁵ SAA 5075, NAA 6604, f 340.

⁸⁶ SAA 5075, NAA 6604, f 339.

⁸⁷ SAA 5075, NAA 6604, f 353. For information on such books see Westrienen, *Groote*. 75-79.

his extensive library suggests that at the very least he had an interest in traveling there. This fact, coupled with the presence of Italian pictures as well as pictures by artists like van Schrieck and van Aelst who had themselves traveled to Italy suggests that van Aelst's attempts at spreading his reputation may have met with some success. A second Amsterdam inventory supports the notion that van Aelst's work in Italy was a significant factor in his commercial success. This inventory was drawn up on the death of Cornelia Bierens, who was the widow of Adriaan Hoek Janszoon. The inventory is dated November 1, 1719. The painting by van Aelst that is included in the inventory of paintings, which were assessed separately, is described as: *Een stuck schilderij zijnde capitaale stuck groote vogels van van Aelst* (One grand painting of large birds by van Aelst) and is given the valuation of: *F63:--*.⁸⁸ Next to the van Aelst, which is described in the *Boven voor kamer* (upstairs front room) is yet another painting by Otto Marseus van Schrieck.⁸⁹ As in the previous inventory, there is also a very extensive and detailed listing of the library. Once again, there are a number of travel books including one described as a *Wegwijzer door italie*.⁹⁰ Again, although the volume does not confirm that the owners made such a trip, it suggests, at the very least, interest. Such interest, in turn, might be sparked by a painting created by an artist who so clearly advertises his Italian credentials yet who paints in a more traditionally Northern style.

⁸⁸ SAA 5075, NAA 7604 unpaginated. With first page of inventory as page 1, I place the painting by van Aelst on page 42.

⁸⁹ SAA 5075, NAA 7604, 42.

⁹⁰ SAA 5075, NAA 7604, 9.

Ultramarine

The frequent use of the pigment ultramarine, derived from the valuable mineral lapis lazuli, resulted in the deep, brilliant blues that mark many of van Aelst's paintings.⁹¹

Luuc Struyck van der Loeff of the Mauritshuis first mentioned in passing the presence of ultramarine in their 1663 flowerpiece by van Aelst (figure 25).⁹² Ingvar Bergstrom then published an article that discussed its presence more explicitly in three hunt paintings by van Aelst.⁹³ In the Mauritshuis painting the ultramarine is present, mixed with lead white, in the now characteristic blue-toned leaves, whose present color derives from the disappearance of fugitive yellow glazing.⁹⁴ In the three hunt paintings it is present in a more unadulterated form in the velvet hunting bags arrayed in the foregrounds.

Ultramarine was derived from the semi-precious stone lapis lazuli, which is only found in the mountains in modern day Afghanistan. Extraction methods are exceedingly laborious, with the finest quality of ultramarine representing only one percent of the original weight of the lapis lazuli. This preparation was so complex that it was normally accomplished by specialist providers. Accordingly, the final pigment was one of the most expensive

⁹¹ Bergström, "Wonderful.", Loeff, "Zoek." Julia A. DeLancey, "Dragonsblood and Ultramarine: The Apothecary and Artist's Pigments In Renaissance Florence," in *The Art Market in Italy 15th-17th Centuries*, ed. Marcello Fantoni, Louisa C. Matthew, and Sara F. Matthews-Grieco (Ferrara: Franco Cosimo Panini, 2003).

⁹² Loeff, "Zoek." 114.

⁹³ Bergström, "Wonderful." 74-77. These paintings are located in the Nationalmuseum Stockholm, the Staatlich Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe, and the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation in Houston.

⁹⁴ As van der Loeff's article explains, the blue tone in the leaves is due to the fact that they originally possessed a varied, yellow toned glaze which would have transformed the blue leaves into green. This transformation into blue is visible in a number of van Aelst's other paintings.

available.⁹⁵ Indeed, so costly was the pigment that the highest grade was known to have cost as much as seventy times the cost of the lowest grade of available ultramarine.⁹⁶ Unlike cheaper azurite or smalt, the blue produced by good quality ultramarine was stable, deep and rich in color. In order to save money, artists would often use it only in combination with another pigment such as lead white, or sometimes only in a final upper layer of glaze.⁹⁷ True ultramarine, therefore, due to the luminous quality and depth of color would have been evident in comparison with a less expensive alternative such as smalt. A knowledgeable *liefhebber* or connoisseur very likely could identify true ultramarine. Indeed, when Jean-Michel Picart places his order for paintings with the Antwerp dealer Matthijs Musson he specifically requests that the skies in a group of landscape paintings be painted with “goede verven” or quality paint.⁹⁸ In this instance we can interpret his stipulation to mean that the paint should be of a superior grade. The sensitivity Picart shows to the awareness of his buyers suggests that knowledge and understanding of details such as paint type and quality may have been surprisingly widespread. For van Aelst to use ultramarine in his paintings suggests that he was deliberately producing work for a knowledgeable upper tier of the market. Buyers who

⁹⁵ Arie Wallert, "Methods and Materials of Still Life Painting in the Seventeenth Century," in *Still Lifes: Techniques and Style An Examination of Paintings from the Rijksmuseum*, ed. Arie Wallert (Zwolle: Waanders, 1999). 19.

⁹⁶ Mary Beal, *A Study of Richard Symonds His Italian Notebooks and their Relevance to Seventeenth-Century Painting Techniques* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1984). 94. In the source Beal notes that the highest grade of ultramarine was valued at 21 scudi per ounce, while the lowest could be gotten for only 3 julios (there were ten julios in one scudo). Further ultramarine prices can be found in Jo Kirby, "The Price of Quality: Factors Influencing the Cost of Pigments During the Renaissance," in *Revaluing Renaissance Art*, ed. Gabriele Neher and Rupert Shepherd (Aldershot, England; Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2000).

⁹⁷ Beal, *Symonds*. 95.

⁹⁸ Marchi and Miegroet, "Novelty." 223-225.

were aware of such matters would have been cognizant of the fact that his paintings were painted using such a valuable pigment and would not only have appreciated the extra expense and ultimate effect, but would also have been willing to pay the higher price.

Indeed, in the inventory of Herman Becker's possessions, the wealthy merchant who famously loaned money to Rembrandt, we find not only a van Aelst *Patrijs met wijtuigh*, (partridge with a game bag) we also find an entry describing *twalf stux lapis* (twelve pieces of lapis).⁹⁹ Thus Becker, whose inventory contained many items of great value, would truly have known the value inherent in the brilliant blue velvet game bag that most likely graced the foreground of van Aelst's painting. Van Aelst's deep, luminous blues, therefore were not merely beautiful and harmonious, they were also intrinsically precious.

Hunt Still Lifes and Mythological Reliefs

The discussion of the ultramarine pigment found so readily in many of the brilliant blue hunting bags in many of van Aelst's gamepieces, draws our attention to these paintings as a group within van Aelst's oeuvre. It is well known that hunting, particularly falconry, was a sport restricted solely to the nobility based on long established laws.¹⁰⁰ Paintings of the spoils of the hunt of all varieties therefore would have had appeal not only to those members of society able to hunt, but also to those

⁹⁹ SAA 5075, NAA 4676. The painting by van Aelst is listed on f285 and the lapis is listed on f281. Further discussion of Becker can be found in a number of sources, most recently Hugo J. Postma, "De Amsterdamse Verzamelaar Herman Becker (ca. 1617-1678); Nieuwe Gegevens over een Geldschieder van Rembrandt," *Oud Holland* 102, no. 1 (1988).

¹⁰⁰ Sullivan, *Gamepiece*. 34.

members of society who aspired to hunt.¹⁰¹ Van Aelst was by no means the sole painter creating hunt still lifes, but as we saw in Chapter three, it is clear that van Aelst was one of the leading figures responsible for drawing hunt paintings away from their traditional associations with kitchen pieces and making them more elegant and suitable for a refined interior. He accomplished this not only through his exceptionally fine and meticulous finish, but also through the inclusion of costly or appealing objects such as velvet hunt bags, elaborate firearms, tufted falcon hoods and silver handled swords. These gleaming, richly colored objects, juxtaposed with the detailed feathers, beaks and scaled feet of his birds, are like elaborate and appealing toys for a wealthy child. Their visual appeal is unquestionable, and they lend an elegance and sophistication to his hunt paintings that was not yet common in other contemporary manifestations of the genre.

One additional element that van Aelst's hunt pieces often depict, and which would have increased their appeal, is a sculptural frieze as a support for the tabletop or ledge on which the still life is arranged. There are three different friezes that can be found in van Aelst's surviving hunt paintings, one appears only once, one appears twice and one appears in five different paintings. All three friezes are recognizable, and all three depict mythological scenes or figures. The scene that appears only once depicts what appears to be a somewhat undefined group of Putti (figure 76). Interestingly, the frieze with the putti, which is severely cropped, resembles a portion of the frieze depicted in Gerrit

¹⁰¹ This notion that a painting might act as a replacement or "stand in" for an object that was not available to its owner is one possibility put forth in the reasoned argument made in Hochstrasser, "Imag(in)ing." I have simply extended the argument slightly to include the similar function that a depiction of a pastime that was equally unavailable might play.

Dou's 1655 painting of a maidservant in the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum (figure 77). The frieze that appears in two different still lifes pictures a drunken Silenus held up by a band of satyrs (figure 78) The frieze he most commonly depicts, however, is a specifically identifiable scene depicting Diana and Actaeon.¹⁰² It appears in five different paintings (figures 53, 51, 79, 50 & 80). The subject of this scene, in which the goddess of the hunt is unwittingly spied by the young Prince and then turned into a stag and devoured by his own dogs, is certainly appropriate for the subject matter of the paintings. While the broad theme of hunting is present in this subject, it is also a rather cruel tale in which the hunter suddenly becomes the unfortunate object of the hunt.¹⁰³ A learned viewer familiar with the tale recounted by Ovid might also wonder the degree to which van Aelst was toying with the viewer's privileged role as a hunter and suggesting that he too will someday come to an end as Actaeon did. That his patrons might be aware of such underlying implications is confirmed in the November 1, 1719 inventory of Cornelia Bierens, widow of Adriaan Hoek Janszoon, discussed above. As noted before, the inventory contains a large number of books and there are several volumes by Vondel. The one most germane to this discussion is listed as *Vondel's Ovidius*, or Vondel's translation of Ovid.¹⁰⁴ Significantly, the painting by van Aelst is a hunt piece described as a "capital piece with large birds."¹⁰⁵ The description suggests that it is one of the larger of van Aelst's still life types, and the larger hunt paintings were more likely to contain

¹⁰² Barolsky, "Metamorphosis."

¹⁰³ Barolsky discusses this irony at some length.

¹⁰⁴ SAA 5075, NAA 7604. As noted above, the inventory is unpaginated, however the book appears on the 9th page of the inventory.

¹⁰⁵ SAA 5075, NAA 7604 unpaginated. the painting by van Aelst appears on page 42 of the inventory.

friezes than the smaller, single bird compositions.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, this painting was owned by a collector who had the means of understanding the mythological frieze it very well might have included.

Elements like the friezes appealed to the intellect and education of the collector. That Adriaan Hoek Janszoon might have mused on his painting with his copy of Vondel's Ovid in mind or even in hand is a scenario one might imagine. However, the inclusion of the frieze would have also held visual appeal for a collector and would have subtly alluded to the notion of *paragone*. The frieze was an additional opportunity for van Aelst to display his virtuosity, his ability to depict the soft, complex feathers of a bird, the muted sheen of the velvet hunting bag, and the shallow relief of a sculptural frieze.¹⁰⁷ Thus the sculptural frieze functioned on several levels, it added a depth and elegance to the genre of the hunt piece, it appealed to the intellect of the collector and enabled yet another display of the masterful artistry of van Aelst.

Vases and Silverwork

The still lifes of van Aelst also appealed to the collecting interests of his buyers. The most obvious manifestation of this is his production of flower paintings during a

¹⁰⁶ An example of a smaller hunt piece would be the 1671 hunt with a single partridge in Schwerin. I discuss the distinct types of hunt paintings van Aelst produces in chapter three.

¹⁰⁷ Gerrit Dou also famously used the device of the frieze in the foreground of his paintings in a similar fashion. For further discussion of this see the insightful essay by Eric Jan Sluijter, "In Praise of the Art of Painting: On Paintings by Gerrit Dou and a Treatise by Philips Angel of 1642," in *Seductress of Sight: Studies in Dutch Art of the Golden Age*, ed. Eric Jan Sluijter (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000). 210-213.

period when the tulip was a highly coveted flower.¹⁰⁸ Accordingly, tulips feature prominently in a great many of van Aelst's flower pieces. However, as with the appeal of his hunt paintings, van Aelst was by no means the sole practitioner of the genre of flower painting. A great many talented painters were also creating beautiful images of flowers that would last far longer than the genuine objects. Once again, in order to distinguish his flower paintings, van Aelst was careful not only to introduce compositional innovation in terms of the dynamic diagonal axis of his bouquets, but also to introduce rarity and desirability in the form of the vases in which the flowers are contained, depicting vessels ranging from carved stone with metal mounts to elaborate auricular silver vases in the style of Johannes Lutma.

In addition to the inclusion of auricular silver vases in his flower pieces, van Aelst also employed similarly elaborate silver objects in his fish and fruit paintings. The auricular style of silverwork featured in van Aelst's paintings was a uniquely Dutch phenomenon, developed initially in the work of brothers Paulus and Adam van Vianen, famed Utrecht silversmiths, and later carried on by Adam's son Christiaan van Vianen, as well as Johannes Lutma, who was strongly influenced by the work of Adam van Vianen.¹⁰⁹ The style is characterized by organic, flowing forms that appear to abandon all

¹⁰⁸ Anne Goldgar, "Nature as Art: The Case of the Tulip," in *Merchants and Marvels: Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Pamela H. Smith and Paula Findlen (New York, London: Routledge, 2002). For a thorough discussion of the tulip collecting craze see Anne Goldgar, *Tulipmania: Money, Honor and Knowledge in the Dutch Golden Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁹ For a thorough study of the van Vianen family see Joh. R. ter Molen, "Van Vianen: Een Utrechtse Familie van zilversmeden met een internationale faam" (Doctoral, Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden, 1984). The van Vianens are also discussed at some length, as is Johannes Lutma, in J. W. Frederiks, *Dutch Silver: Embossed Plaquettes Tazze and Dishes from the Renaissance until the end of the eighteenth-century* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952). J. W. Frederiks, *Dutch Silver: Embossed Ecclesiastical and Secular Plate*

traditional conventions of silverwork. Inspiration was taken from natural forms like sea shells and the cartilaginous form of the human ear. The work of these silversmiths was exceptionally well known. Paulus van Vianen famously worked for Rudolf II in Prague, and Johannes Lutma's etched portrait was made by none other than Rembrandt.¹¹⁰ As silver was sold primarily by weight, the objects made by these master silversmiths, which were frequently quite large, and thus heavy, were of great intrinsic value. A silver coffee pot once part of the household of Cornelia Bierens, whose 1719 inventory was discussed above, which weighed "120 loot" was valued at 174 florijns, a tremendous amount of money simply for a coffee pot.¹¹¹ It seems difficult to imagine that these objects, which frequently made some nod to a utilitarian purpose, as a standing salt, a pitcher, or a platter, were actually used for the purpose for which they were designed. Not only were many of these objects vastly expensive, some of them were remarkably impractical. It becomes clear, upon studying objects like the cup and cover by Johannes Lutma in the Walters Art Gallery, or the small dish also by Lutma in the Rijksmuseum, that such objects were made primarily for display (figures 81, 82). These were elaborate art objects

from the Renaissance until the end of the eighteenth-century (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961). For more general discussions of Dutch silver see the catalog A. L. den Blaauwen, ed., *Nederlands zilver Dutch Silver* ('s-Gravenhage: Staatsuitgeverij, 1979). And for specifically Amsterdam silver see Jan Rudolph de Lorm, *Amsterdams Goud en Silver* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000). For an in depth study of the development of the auricular or *kwab* style, unfortunately not illustrated, see the dissertation by Antje-Maria von Graevenitz, "Das Niederländische Ohrmuschel-Ornament Phänomen und Entwicklung dargestellt an den Werken und Entwürfen der Goldschmiedfamilien van Vianen und Lutma" (Doctoral, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, 1973).

¹¹⁰ Molen, "Van Vianen". Chapter three is an extended discussion of the life of Paulus van Vianen. Frederiks, *Plaquettes*. 211 gives a list of the known portraits of Lutma, and notes that the 1656 etching by Rembrandt is Muller 3342.

¹¹¹ SAA 5075, NAA 7604 page 44 of the inventory.

made as collectors items.¹¹² For van Aelst to paint so many pictures in which he includes silver objects similar to the production of the van Vianens as well as to the work of Johannes Lutma is indicative of an awareness on his part of the role such objects played. They were not intended to be purely utilitarian, rather they were expressive of the class and distinction of their owner who possessed the taste as well as the means to acquire such an object. Van Aelst's paintings contribute equally to this culture. His paintings that include silver objects, such as the 1657 painting in Copenhagen or the 1659 painting in Berlin function on multiple levels (figures 66 and 68). A painting like this might serve as a surrogate for a collector who couldn't afford such an expensive piece of silver, but who could afford a painting by van Aelst. It might also enter the home of an individual who owned similar objects, and who found pleasing symmetry in the reflection of his collection in van Aelst's painting. Perhaps it was purchased by a connoisseur who understood the elaborate artistry of not only the original silver object, but also the painting itself. These and a myriad of other possibilities likely existed. As Julie Berger Hochstrasser suggests, still life paintings depicting the elaborate material culture of the period were not simply surrogates for the objects they depicted, they participated actively as objects equally indicative of wealth and social standing.¹¹³ Indeed, in the extensive and elaborate inventory of Petronella de la Court precisely such a situation exists. Petronella de la Court is best known for her elaborate dollhouse, which still survives, largely intact

¹¹² For a documentation of the increasingly elaborate domestic culture see Westermann, "Costly."

¹¹³ Hochstrasser's excellent article sensitively evaluates the role still lifes played in this complex culture in Hochstrasser, "Imag(in)ing." I will discuss the notion of competitive artistry in greater depth in the following chapter.

in the Centraal Museum in Utrecht.¹¹⁴ However she and her husband also collected a great number of paintings as well as a remarkable collection of rarities. In her home, in the *voorkamer* in a wooden cabinet with glass doors, was a selection of objects, some carved ivory, one a carved coconut, and one with the following description “*Struijs eijeren gesneden gedne van plaetnis van Paulus van Vianen.*”¹¹⁵ The description is not easily interpreted but it may have been a silver object, designed by van Vianen to look like a carved ostrich egg, or it may have been an actual ostrich egg carved or mounted after designs by van Vianen. The inventory also contains a great number of paintings including *Een stilleven van Guillmo van Aelst.*¹¹⁶ Unfortunately the subject is not given, and all of the paintings are assessed as a group, so it is impossible to know where they were hanging in the house. It is suggestive nevertheless that both the elaborate silver in its cabinet of rarities, and the still life by van Aelst were in the same vast collection. It seems that van Aelst’s elegant style may have appealed to the same refined taste that purchased an object by Paulus van Vianen.

Indeed, it is clear that van Aelst’s depiction of elaborate metalware was recognized as a distinguishing and laudable feature of his paintings. The 1660 poem on van Aelst by Cornelis de Bie speaks to this quite directly.

¹¹⁴ A useful source on de la Court’s Dollhouse can be found in Shirley Glubok, “The Dolls’ House of Petronella de la Court,” *The Magazine Antiques* 137, no. 2 (1990). More information on de la Court as a collector is in Melinda K. van der Ploeg Fallon, “Petronella de la Court and Agneta Block: Experiencing Collections in Late Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam,” *Aurora: Journal of the History of Art* 4 (2003). Her collection of carved ivory is discussed in greater detail in Frits Scholten, “Een Ijvoren Mars van Francis, de Beeldsnijder Van Bossuit en de familie de la Court,” *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 47, no. 1 (1999).

¹¹⁵ SAA 5075, NAA 5338, f 616

¹¹⁶ SAA 5075, NAA 5338, f 605

That which Nature can press from her bosom
 (Called by our Artists still-standing things)
 Wherein a life hides that has no feeling
 A life without spirit, yet in its own way alive:
 As open eyes can see in the fruits of the earth
 So it can be represented by a painter's hand with its brush
 Whether silver or fine gold, whether iron or steel
 And any other material, composed of metal.
 In which Art shows itself, wrought by human hands
 That made van Aelst known, in far lying lands
 Through the art from his brush, which fully discovered life
 That is both without life and tugs at life.¹¹⁷

The explicit manner in which the poem refers to elaborately wrought metalware in which “art shows itself, wrought by human hands” reveals an awareness on the part of de Bie of the value that was placed on such objects. Despite van Aelst’s other areas of specialization, de Bie chooses to concentrate his poem almost exclusively on the depictions of metalwork in his paintings. Indeed, a brief study of his Amsterdam oeuvre after his return from abroad in 1656 and before the publication of this poem in 1660 reveals that the great majority of his paintings, ten out of some fourteen paintings, contained at least one silver object. This tendency to depict silver objects clearly impressed de Bie and must therefore also have impressed potential buyers of van Aelst’s

¹¹⁷ Bie, *Gulden*. 291. The Dutch text is as follows: *Al 't gen' Natura can uyt haeren boesem dringen/ (By onse Constenaers genoemt stil-staende dingen)/ Waer in een leven schuyt dat geen gevoelen heeft/Een leven sonder ziel, doch in sijn selven leeft:/Als in d'aerds vruchten is te sien met open oogen /Dat kan een Schilders handt met haer Pinceel vertoogen./Ist silver oft fijn gout, ist yser ofte stael /En eenich ander stof, van op gemaect metael./Daer sich de Const in thoont, gewrocht van menschen handen /Dat maekt Van Aelst bekent, in veer gelegen Landen /Door Const van sijn Pinceel, die 't leven gans ontdeckt /Die sonder leven is en op het leven treckt*

paintings. De Bie's poem therefore clearly demonstrates the appeal that such depictions would have had in the seventeenth-century.

Although the evidence is not always as direct, what this study of van Aelst's production in light of Amsterdam collectors suggests is that he employed a number of methods he learned while abroad to appeal to an elite and refined class of collector. He continued to paint in the fine style so appreciated both by the Medici and wealthy Dutch collectors, he used quality pigments such as ultramarine to indicate the inherent value of his works, he depicted pastimes such as hunting, in which his audience took part, and couched them in an intellectual framework, finally he also appealed to the culture of collecting, involving both flowers and elaborate silver objects. All of these techniques bear some similarity to the approach which he adopted in Italy. In addition, however, while working in Amsterdam, van Aelst also consciously signed his paintings with the Italian form of his name and associated himself with knowledge of Italian paintings. This lent his paintings an additional layer of appeal and sophistication and indicated the degree to which he had learned to appeal to the particular taste of potential collectors.

Which Came First?: Originals, Copies and Multiplicity

The problem of originals and copies in painting is not a new one. It is a concern common to studies of many artists, including such major figures as Titian and Rubens. Indeed, it is an issue that has occasioned such conferences as the one held by CASVA in

1989 entitled *Retaining the Original: Multiple Originals, Copies and Reproductions*.¹¹⁸

One tendency of discussions of originals and copies is the recurring attempt to answer the question “which came first?” While this can be a useful discussion when trying to determine the oeuvre and working method of an artist, it is not always the most revealing approach to take. Indeed, studies that have broken past this inclination have yielded thoughtful and revealing insights.

One study in particular that approaches the issue from a new direction is that written by Neil de Marchi and Hans van Miegroet and published in 1996 in the volume *Economics of the Arts*.¹¹⁹ This essay is a challenging, synthetic reappraisal of the manner in which the study of originals and copies can be profitably approached. De Marchi and van Miegroet argue quite convincingly that the value associated with an original painting, rather than a copy of an original, is intimately bound up with the increased emphasis placed on invention in the seventeenth-century.¹²⁰ In this context, a copy, even one done by the same artist who executed the original, holds a lesser value than an original because it does not express the initial invention of the artist. De Marchi and van Miegroet prove

¹¹⁸ Kathleen Preciado, ed., *Retaining the Original: Multiple Originals, Copies and Reproductions*, vol. 20, *Studies in the History of Art* (National Gallery of Art, Washington: University Press of New England, 1989).

¹¹⁹ Marchi and Miegroet, "Pricing Invention."

¹²⁰ The chapter “The Price of Inventiveness” in Zirka Zaremba Filipczak’s 1987 book concludes that although art was valued as a traditional commodity in Antwerp, by the second half of the sixteenth-century collectors began to recognize and respond to the claims that artists were making about the importance of invention to their work. Prices for works of art to some degree reflected this process. Zirka Zaremba Filipczak, *Picturing Art in Antwerp: 1550-1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). De Marchi and van Miegroet’s essay expands on Filipczak’s work and attempts to specifically demonstrate the financial value that invention had. De Marchi and van Miegroet conclude, from a study of painting prices, that when the original painting is by one or more masters, and the copy is by the same master or combination of masters, the price ratio for the original to the copy is an average of 2.34 to 1. This dramatic difference in price expresses the real value that the market placed on invention. Marchi and Miegroet, "Pricing Invention." 55-56.

their case using a convincing set of examples, drawing on workshop records of artists like Rubens and Jan Brueghel (both the elder and the younger), to demonstrate this claim and to prove that the higher value placed on invention was implicit in the seventeenth-century art market.¹²¹

In considering originals and copies in the still life paintings of Willem van Aelst, de Marchi and van Miegroet's thesis that an original work of art bore a higher value than a copy because of the value placed on artistic invention, proves exceptionally useful. In the oeuvre of van Aelst there are several instances of copies or what might be seen as secondary versions. For the purposes of this discussion, I am choosing to discuss only works that not only bear a strong resemblance to one another, but that were also executed in the same year or successive years. What a study of this group of paintings reveals is an approach to repetition of compositions that evolves dramatically throughout the course of his life. Early in his career, van Aelst's copies are relatively straightforward with only slight variation and modification of the composition. As his work develops and he becomes more sophisticated in his approach, the copies become more artful; he clearly is using a primary composition but the changes and adaptations he introduces increase. Finally, in his most mature works, van Aelst reveals a completely new approach to the notion of copies, one which might best be described as free improvisations based loosely

¹²¹ While providing examples of instances where the attitude towards originality and invention became more clouded, the following text is also useful for studying contemporary attitudes towards originals and copies:

Jeffrey M. Muller, "Measures of Authenticity: The Detection of Copies in the Early Literature on Connoisseurship," Preciado, ed., *Retaining the Original: Multiple Originals, Copies and Reproductions.*, vol. 20, *Studies in the History of Art* (National Gallery of Art, Washington: University Press of New England, 1989) 141-147.

on an original invention. What this series of comparisons suggests and what I hope to convey, is that van Aelst himself was aware of the value placed on invention and ultimately adapted his “copies” to appear to be and indeed to be originals. In addition to the obvious economic benefits such a strategy would have had, I will argue that van Aelst also saw a less tangible value in being viewed as an artist whose powers of invention were so great that he did not need to resort to copying his old compositions but instead continually invented new ones. The value for his artistic reputation would be of equal consequence to an artist as self conscious and aware of his own artistry as van Aelst was.

The first group of copies, or multiple versions occurs early in van Aelst’s career. The three paintings are at the Staatliche Kunstsammlung, Kassel (Figure 83), the Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Vienna (Figure 84) and the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh (Figure 85). The three paintings are all flower pieces and are all effectively the same composition. The flowers are arranged on a marble ledge in a stone vase with metal mounts. The composition is sinuous in quality, dominated by a vertical, curving branch of pale pink hollyhock that is offset by a pink rose that balances the lower right corner of the bouquet. The dramatic curving bouquet is complemented by the presence of a rock crystal pocket watch with a loop of ultramarine ribbon in the lower right corner, an object that is the veritable signature of Willem van Aelst. All three paintings fit this description with little perceptible variation. The North Carolina painting contains the only difference between the three. It features a mouse on the table to the left of the bouquet and a dragonfly hovering vertically over the uppermost bloom. This

inclusion notwithstanding, the three paintings are virtually identical. The only one of these three paintings to have a signature and date is the Kassel painting. What this grouping exhibits is a relatively orthodox approach to the copying of pictures. There is what we can assume is the primary version (the Kassel painting, simply because it is signed and van Aelst fastidiously signed and dated the vast majority of his paintings) and one or in this case two “secondary” versions which remain relatively faithful to the primary version.¹²² Only in the North Carolina painting does he add slight variation to his painting by way of the mouse and dragonfly. What is crucial to bear in mind when examining these two paintings is the time period in which they were executed, or at the very least the time in which the dated version is executed. 1656 was a year of major transition for van Aelst. The last information that we have of van Aelst’s presence in Italy is a letter at the end of March of 1656, from Paolo del Sera in Venice to Cardinal Leopoldo de Medici in Florence, stating that van Aelst had recently visited him and delivered a letter.¹²³ 1656 is also the year that Houbraken gives for van Aelst’s return to the Netherlands from Italy.¹²⁴ That a painting (or even three paintings) was created in this

¹²² Renate Trnek, *Die Holländischen Gemälde des 17. Jahrhunderts in der Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Wien, Band 1* (Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1992) 4-7.; Gregor J.M. Weber, *Stilleben alter Meister in der Kassler Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Kunstsammlung, Kassel* (Melsungen: Verlag Gutenberg, 1989) cat. no. 24.

¹²³ Geisenheimer, "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Niederländischen Kunsthandels in der zweite Hälfte des XVII. Jahrhunderts. Dem Florentiner Staatsarchiv entnommen.", 37-38. Prior to this in January 1654 there was also a letter between Francesco Piermattei in Rome and Cardinal Leopoldo insinuating that van Aelst had been involved in some criminal activity (Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Archivio mediceo del Principato 5326, c.905) This information can be found in: Marco Chiarini, *Il Giardino del Granduca: Natura Morta nelle Collezioni Medicee* (Torino: Seat, 1997) 129-130.

¹²⁴ Refer to chapter two for a full discussion of Houbraken’s biography of Willem van Aelst. The first reference we have to van Aelst in Amsterdam is on the 20th of April, 1657. At that time his Uncle and teacher Evert van Aelst had died in Delft and Willem was contacted regarding the collection of his estate. Willem, who is described as living in Amsterdam, repudiated the estate because his Uncle died a pauper.

year of transition suggests not only that he continued working despite the move back home, but perhaps that he was also in need of money and needed to create works for sale. The two additional versions suggest that they were done while the Kassel version was still in the studio because their level of detail and accuracy appears to be so high. This kind of quick production is similar to the dealer practice of using an original work of art in their possession as a template from which to create copies and generate profits.¹²⁵ Although the prices gained for these copies would most likely have been less than the price realized for the original, the quantity and relative ease of production would have compensated van Aelst sufficiently. Indeed, at a time in which he had expenses both from his return home as well as from his attempt to establish himself in Amsterdam, it is likely that the money gained may have been sorely needed.

This overtly commercial process of making faithful copies of original compositions is not something that seems to have appealed to van Aelst in the rest of his career. As we shall see, the rest of his multiple versions are disguised with ever increasing degrees of subtlety and sophistication, and there are no further groups that exactly replicate this trio of flower paintings.

The second grouping under consideration, also a group of three flower pieces, presents a much more complex case. The three paintings in question were not all painted

The reference is found in Abraham Bredius, *Drie Delftsche Schilders: Evert van Aelst, Pieter Jansz van Asch, en Adam Pick*, Oud-Holland, 12 (1894), 292.

¹²⁵ De Marchi and van Miegroet discuss this practice at some length in their essay, the most striking instance of it being when the dealer Christostomus van Immerseel writes to his wife in 1634 about some Jan Brueghel II originals that he had acquired. He notes their quality and writes to her “The principals will serve here as a shoemaker’s last...” (Antwerp Stadsarchief, Insolvente Boedelkamer, IB 204, letter dated 11 October 1634), 52.

in the same year. The first, and arguably, the composition that formed the germ for the other two, was painted in 1659/60 and is the monumental and fascinating flower piece from the Michaelis Collection in Cape Town (Figure 86). The other two paintings both date from 1663 and are located at the Legion of Honor Museum in San Francisco (Figure 21) and the Mauritshuis in The Hague (Figure 25).¹²⁶ Although there is a three year gap between the Cape Town picture and the other two paintings, the link between them, while perhaps not direct, is strong.¹²⁷ All three works have the same pronounced diagonal movement from lower left to upper right. Similar flowers are used throughout the three works. Poppies especially are used for their sculptural, kinetic qualities, but flowers like roses, tulips and irises are also present. Two of the works share the motif of the carpet or drapery in the right hand foreground, all three have dragonflies swooping into the composition from the left and all three bear van Aelst's signature rock crystal pocket watch with its brilliant blue ribbon. All three, moreover, share virtually the same auricular silver Johannes Lutma-style vase.

It is the study of the detail of the vase that makes the three paintings quite interesting as a group and is indicative of emerging tendencies in van Aelst's approach to objects that will be explored below. In the Cape Town picture, the vase has the same footed shape, but a close examination and comparison with the vases pictured in the two

¹²⁶ The 1663 painting in the Asmolean Museum (#56 in appendix) is also related to the paintings in The Hague and San Francisco. However the wholly different vase and types of flowers do not suggest as direct a relationship as is apparent between the above mentioned works.

¹²⁷ This relationship is discussed by the following sources: Ben Broos, *Great Dutch Paintings From America*, (Zwolle: Waanders, 1991) 130-133; Hans Franssen, *Michaelis Collection, The Old Town House, Cape Town: Catalogue of the Collection of Paintings and Drawings*, (Zwolle: Waanders, 1997) 84-85. Broos suggests that the San Francisco picture is the primary version of the two 1663 works.

later paintings reveals that it is in fact quite a different vase altogether. The vase in the Cape Town picture is very elaborate and detailed. A central putto adorns the body of the vase, and its legs merge into writhing, ropy snake-like forms, giving the vessel a muscular, sinewy character. The vase takes on an anthropomorphic quality and echoes the criss-crossing stems and fat, swollen flower buds of the composition. An examination of the vases pictured in the two later works (which are virtually identical between the two 1663 paintings) reveals that, while clearly retaining the original shape and general decorative program of the vase pictured in the earlier painting, they depart considerably in the level of detail and specificity. The putto is gone in the later vases as are the highly defined rope-like elements. In general the design of the later vases is more stylized, more abstract and more decorative than the earlier vase.¹²⁸

It is clear that the Cape Town picture was in some manner the source for the two later 1663 paintings. There are enough similarities that we can assume that the inspiration for the later compositions came from this painting. The differences are enough however, as is the considerable period of time between the execution, to suggest that the link is not direct but perhaps drawn from memory, or some other record van Aelst may have kept of his compositions. The same cannot be said of the two 1663 compositions, which present a striking example of van Aelst's evolving approach to the copying of his own compositions. The rote reproduction that we saw in the earlier group from 1656 (Figures 83, 84 & 85) is replaced here by a subtler and more complex approach.

¹²⁸ Close study also reveals that the shape of the vase alters slightly between the two 1663 works. The Mauritshuis painting contains a vase that is slightly taller, the narrow portion above the vase's foot is more extended than in the San Francisco painting

The two 1663 paintings differ only slightly in size, with the San Francisco painting (Figure 21) being slightly larger (67.6 x 54.5 cm) than the Mauritshuis painting (62.5 x 49 cm) (Figure 25). The compositions again bear the same striking upper right to lower left diagonal, although the relationship here is very strong, with a blooming scarlet poppy and its buds marking the upper right corner and a cluster of either roses (Figure 21) or red and white striped carnations (Figure 25) marking the lower left. The strong sculptural leaves of the flowers help to fill out and demarcate the edges of the compositions and mounds of white viburnums fill in the depths at the center of both bouquets. As noted above, both compositions also contain the rock-crystal pocket watch with its ultramarine ribbon that becomes a hallmark of van Aelst flower pieces, although the placement varies slightly between the two paintings. The similarities between the two works conclude at this point.

In broad terms, the San Francisco painting is simply a depiction of a larger bouquet. The poppy at the upper right corner is offset by a majestic purple iris which rises above the composition, tilting slightly to the left and causing the strong diagonal to be somewhat less pronounced. Also, the center of the composition features a very bloomed-out red and white parrot tulip that draws our attention because it falls precisely on the diagonal axis between the scarlet poppy and the cluster of pink roses. The dragonfly is also placed differently. It swoops in from the left with a greater sense of movement and is silhouetted against the almost pitch black background of the composition. The pocket watch is perched precariously on the edge of the table, and feels

as though it might fall out at us. This effect is heightened by the fact that the watch lies upon one of the other major differences between the two works, the dark, purple-black velvet cloth with its gold fringe. The Mauritshuis painting lacks this cloth, but as if to compensate, van Aelst has placed the plump bow of the blue ribbon in precisely the same place in the composition where we would have found the velvet cloth.

The Mauritshuis painting, in comparison with the San Francisco paintings, takes on an almost sculptural quality. This effect is especially notable in the leaves just below the poppy, which actually compose almost a quarter of the bouquet. In addition, the Mauritshuis painting is lighter in tonality. While the San Francisco painting has a black background, with the dark velvet cloth and a black void of space beneath the characteristic marble tabletop, the Mauritshuis painting reveals a clearly indicated light source on the right and the suggestion of a cabinet base to the marble top that is described in a lighter brown paint. The effect of the San Francisco painting is almost one of enamel, the colors are so pronounced against the dark background of the composition. This is especially notable in the purple iris and the leaves of the roses which dip down below the table edge. By contrast the Mauritshuis painting is more even in tone, with less contrast, although the composition still uses the same dramatic color palette as the San Francisco painting.

The reason such a close comparison is revealing, is that it both suggests that these paintings derived from a single compositional concept, and reveals van Aelst actively working to introduce enough variety and difference in his compositions that the resulting

paintings are actually quite different from one another. It is an approach to “copying” that suggests that van Aelst was aware of the premium being placed on the invention associated with an original, and developed a technique that allowed him to utilize the same basic composition as defined by the Cape Town picture, but effectively create two additional and different paintings. Several other examples of this technique, which evolves and becomes more subtle as van Aelst matures, will be examined below.

Some five years after his initial experiments in variable multiples with the 1663 pictures in San Francisco and The Hague, van Aelst creates another “pair” of images. In 1668, he produces two hunt pieces that carry on the theme discussed above. The two paintings depict a strikingly similar grouping of objects, although van Aelst has taken care to vary his subject matter enough to suggest that the paintings were painted independently of one another. The paintings are located in Delft at the Prinsenhof Museum (Figure 87) and at the Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe (Figure 88). Both works feature partridges as their primary subjects and in both paintings the birds are arrayed on brilliant blue velvet game bags accented with gold fringe and leather straps. In the background of both works are hunting horns with red and gold tassels, bird whistles and the tell-tale shafts and strings of a *vangnet*, or hunting net. Both works are set in niches and both works display their birds suspended by one foot, with the other foot dangling, the wings open and creating an elegant curve and drape that responds to the arched top of

the niche. Additionally, the two works are virtually the same size, the Karlsruhe picture being only a few centimeters larger.¹²⁹

A closer study of the pictures, however, reveals not only the striking similarities but the elegant variations that van Aelst has introduced. On the most basic level, the architectural backdrop for each of the paintings, while falling beneath the rubric of “niche,” exhibits a remarkable variation of form. In the Delft painting the composition rests on the figured marble ledge that is so familiar in van Aelst paintings. A vague suggestion of molding is visible beneath this ledge, but the remainder of the space below the ledge fades into blackness. In the Karlsruhe painting, on the other hand, the ledge appears to be composed of the same stone as the surrounding walls and seems to be supported by two square pilasters on either side fading into the same darkness as in the Delft painting. Moving upwards, the game bag in each painting, while seemingly identical in type, is arrayed to remarkably different effect. Both are draped with their open end on the left side of the painting, but while the Karlsruhe bag angles out towards the viewer, the Delft bag angles away from us. In the Delft picture this gives van Aelst greater opportunity to display his mastery of materials, with the striking contrast between the plush blue velvet and the worn buff leather displayed so prominently in the foreground. Interestingly, van Aelst manages to display the same skill in the Karlsruhe painting, however using instead the juxtaposition of the inner and outer faces of the strap of bag which dangle into the foreground of the painting. The cluster of the shafts of the

¹²⁹ This size difference is as follows: Delft: 65.5 x 53 cm; Karlsruhe: 68 x 54 cm. The difference is largely in height, and given the greater extent of wall that is visible above the niche in the Karlsruhe painting, it is entirely possible that the Delft painting was cut down slightly during the course of its life.

net are slightly raised in the Delft painting, but occupy virtually the same position in each work. Above the game bag, the next major compositional difference manifests itself. The two paintings seem to be virtual mirror images of one another, with the Karlsruhe partridge dangling from its right foot and curving down towards the bottom right corner of the painting and the Delft partridge hanging from its left foot and draping towards the bottom left corner of the painting. The hunting horns in the background echo this opposition, arching off to both the right and the left. The curve of the horn and the sweeping curve of the open wings of the bird in each work serve to carve elegant arcs that mirror the arches of the niche and give both compositions a striking circular quality.

The elements hanging above the central partridges in each work are also areas in which van Aelst has introduced variation. Both works depict bird whistles in different positions, and reveal the mouthpieces of the hunting horns, but the similarities conclude at this point. What is plainly visible in the Delft picture is that van Aelst has not only included one partridge but two, the second hangs behind the first and is barely visible save its right facing tail and its head, almost lost in the shadowy background. As if to compensate for the lack of a second bird in the Karlsruhe version, van Aelst includes a pair of plumed falcon hoods in the cluster of objects dangling above the single partridge. In this way, he maintains the same level of compositional complexity in each piece, while at the same time introducing enough variation to result in two unique, though undeniably related, paintings. With this pair of paintings, therefore, van Aelst has caused the copies

to not only act as mirror images of one another but also balanced and varied the complexity of the objects included to create two equally valuable works.

The next pair of images exhibits a new approach to the notion of multiple versions, one often noted in still life painting as a genre, but not as obviously displayed and manipulated as in this pair of paintings. What van Aelst explores in these images is the notion that a larger still life can frequently be composed of several smaller sub-compositions. In this case he paints the larger still life and then isolates and extracts one of the sub-compositions to form a separate painting. The pair under consideration also departs somewhat from the stated guidelines of the discussion in that one is clearly signed and dated 1677, while the other is only signed, with no visible date. Despite this discrepancy, they are also very similar in size, differing only by approximately two centimeters for each dimension.¹³⁰ The two works are fruitpieces and depict both a large, somewhat sprawling composition (Figure 89) as well as what can be seen as a tighter detail or sub-composition of the larger painting (Figure 47). The two works are based on the basic compositional structure of a flat bottomed basket of fruit lying slightly tipped on its side and spilling its contents onto the table beneath, which is draped in red velvet. Both works also incorporate an elaborate silver salver onto which the fruit spills and on which a somewhat improbable pyramid of peaches rests. Although the salvers seem to be related in style and manufacture, they vary considerably in size. Once again both works share many of the same elements, both use green and purple grapes, and both works

¹³⁰ The two paintings are indeed very close in dimension, the private collection painting measures approximately 74 x 56 cm, while the Kassel painting measures 76.7 x 58.3 cm. The Kassel painting is signed and dated 1677, the private collection painting is only signed.

display a branch with grapes and grape leaves hanging down over the edge of the table into the left foreground. These hanging branches are home to an array of creatures in each work, mainly moths, but in the private collection painting a snail also crawls heroically upward. As in previous pairs, the works also exhibit a number of variations. The private collection painting depicts medlars above the central cluster of grapes in the basket, while the Kassel painting depicts only branches in the medlar's stead. The Kassel painting includes peaches beneath the grapes in the basket, while the private collection basket contains only a more abundant share of purple and green grapes. Both works depict a small assortment of nuts in the left foreground of the composition, but while the chestnuts in the private collection painting lie next to the salver the walnuts in the Kassel painting lie on the platter. Indeed, the Kassel painting also contains a small mouse in approximately the same position as the chestnuts in the private collection painting. The mouse's place is taken by a stark white moth in the private collection painting.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the two works is the large cluster of grapes to the right of the pyramid of peaches in the Kassel painting. These grapes also draw our attention to the fact that the scale of the composition within the painting differs strikingly, the private collection painting having a much tighter focus and appearing to be a more essential version of the other work. The notion of excerpting a portion of a larger composition differs somewhat from the approach van Aelst took to the previous pairs under discussion. Rather than making great changes in disposition of objects or even flipping the orientation of the composition as was apparent in the previous pairs, van

Aelst here uses the structure of one composition, tightens his focus and creates a work intimately linked to the previous work, but undeniably an independent painting.

The final pair of images under consideration is perhaps the most complex and challenging to understand and is the result of a total transformation in composition and approach. Once again the paintings were executed in the same year, 1678, very late in the life of the artist. The paintings both surfaced on the art market within a year of one another and it is assumed that they are now in private hands. One was for sale in Vienna at the Kunsthandel Galerie Sanct Lucas in 1998 (Figure 90) and the other was sold by Sotheby's New York in a 1999 sale (Figure 71).¹³¹ The works differ somewhat in size with the painting that was for sale in Vienna being somewhat larger (67.7 x 54.6 cm) than the painting sold by Sotheby's in New York (51.5 x 45 cm). The subject category of the paintings, broadly, is that of a fish piece, however, the type of fish piece that van Aelst creates is unlike that created by any other artist. As noted in chapter 3, unlike other practitioners of the genre, van Aelst's fish pieces elevate the subject matter from humble assemblies of fish in kitchens and on beaches, notable mainly for their description of surface and texture. In his paintings, the modest fish is surrounded by the appropriate makings of a meal, and most notably elaborate silver and glass objects that connote wealth and privilege, as do the velvet cloths and marble tabletops upon which the still

¹³¹ The references to both of these pictures were found in the photo files of the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie in The Hague.

lifes are arranged.¹³² These two paintings are excellent examples of the type as well as being an interesting case study when juxtaposed.

As was apparent in earlier pairings, both works contain the same basic elements, here we see a silver platter of fish, an agate handled knife, a roll, onions, glassware and most notably an elaborate piece of silverwork. What is also apparent from initial observation of these works, however, is that while they contain these common elements, the disposition, orientation and in some sense the character of the elements has changed quite dramatically. Not only do these changes result in two different though related paintings, but they are also evidence of van Aelst's creativity as well as of his sense of humor and his awareness of his own skill as an artist.

In order to facilitate the consideration of these paintings as a pair, we must observe how they are structured. On the platters, which are positioned in the center to right foregrounds of each painting, the fish are arranged at similar angles. The heads of the fish are both on the left sides of the platters while their partially deconstructed bodies are arranged at diagonals oriented towards the back right corners of the paintings. In both works the agate handle of the knife protruding off of the table echoes this angle. Behind the platter in each work a roll of bread with warm golden brown crust suggests some sort of repast. The larger painting also depicts a pair of onions next to the roll, a grouping which is repeated in the smaller painting in the left foreground. Interestingly, this same left foreground position is also occupied by onions in the larger work, except in this

¹³² For a discussion of the different food pairings associated with fish, an excellent source is: Julie Berger Hochstrasser, *Life and Still Life: A Cultural Inquiry into Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still Life Painting*, (Dissertation: University of California, Berkeley, 1995) see especially 72-75, 91-92.

instance the variety is spring onions. It is not clear whether van Aelst might have made this substitution consciously, but it seems to suggest a certain levity about his composition. This sort of movement of objects also occurs with the twig of hazelnuts that appears both to the left of the onions in the smaller work as well as on top of the silver *zoutvat* in the larger work. In both paintings, although to different degrees in each, van Aelst has taken advantage of the black background that he chose and has used the highlights visible on background glassware to give his compositions depth, movement and luminosity. In the smaller of the two works he has included three discernable pieces of glassware while in the larger work there is only one. However, in the larger work, to add further interest and variety to the background van Aelst has included a small box topped by a plate of green olives which glisten wetly in the soft shadows. Finally, the red velvet cloth on which both compositions are arranged is reversed between the two pictures, in each work the cloth is arrayed perpendicular to the angle of the knife and fish, but in the larger painting he reveals the edge of marble table on the right side of the composition and in the smaller painting the table is revealed on the left.

The aspect of both works that is most compelling and which has scarcely been discussed is the large, auricular and sculptural silver object virtually in the center of both works. The base of each object is a swirling, complex mass, roughly pyramidal in shape, and composed, one can assume, of silver, partially gilt. Seated atop the elaborate golden base is the silver figure of Orpheus intently playing what appears to be a violin. The gilded auricular base continues up behind the seated figure of Orpheus, arching over his

head and adopting an almost tree like form. It is at this point that the two objects, mounted as they are on such identical bases, differ. The object in the larger painting is topped by an unadorned nautilus shell while the object in the smaller painting is topped by an elaborate decorative dish in gilded silver.¹³³ Therefore van Aelst depicts two virtually identical bases with two totally different upper elements to them. Indeed, further examination of his oeuvre reveals a painting in Schwerin dated to 1672 with the same base and yet another variation on the top (Figure 18). Yet another painting that appeared on the market in the 1980's contains an object very much like the one depicted in the smaller of the two paintings (Figure 91).¹³⁴ What all of this ultimately makes clear is that van Aelst is not only varying his compositions, shifting objects around and repeating rhythmic passages, but he is also reinventing the very objects that he is depicting.

The notion that van Aelst is taking such creative liberties with the objects he is painting and altering them in such a striking manner is not in and of itself terribly remarkable. Indeed, artists have been reinventing their subjects from the earliest moments of art history. It is the objects he chooses to reinvent that are so striking to consider. These silver objects, whatever their original form may have been, were not only terribly expensive, but they were also undeniably works of art in their own right.¹³⁵ Silversmiths were members of a guild and were regarded as highly skilled artisans. Although I have

¹³³ It is not fully clear precisely what purpose the dish-like top is intended to serve. When the painting was sold by Sotheby's in 1999 the object was described as an "Orpheus salt cellar". It has also been suggested to me that the object is a *bekerschroef*.

¹³⁴ The painting was for sale in The Hague at Kunsthandel J. Hoogsteder in 1983, the reference is drawn from the files of the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie in The Hague.

¹³⁵ The August 15, 1703 inventory of Amsterdam resident Paolo van Uchelen features a simple pair of square silver candlesticks valued at 170.8 guilders. An elaborate and rare object like a nautilus cup would have been far more expensive. SAA 5075, NAA 6455 ff. 1481.

not yet been able to link the silver object with the known production of a silversmith, it is enough to note that the work bears a strong resemblance to the production of masters like Johannes Lutma and the members of the van Vianen family.¹³⁶ For instance, a standing salt by Adam van Vianen (Figure 92) in the collection of the Rijksmuseum, while not identical to the object depicted by van Aelst suggests that the object he was depicting was probably the production of a master silversmith. Purely depicting such an object in his paintings was both a form of praise of the original maker and object as well as a subtle example of artistic rivalry. In choosing to depict these silver objects van Aelst is proving that he too is able to create something of extraordinary value. Indeed, it may be argued that his skill is all the greater for while the silversmith is working with a material that is inherently valuable, van Aelst is creating his images using a substance that is relatively valueless. Van Aelst also chooses to depict the silver object from different angles, thereby exhibiting his ability to create in three dimensions like a sculptor (or in this case silversmith) and alluding subtly to the concept of *paragone* or the traditional rivalry between the different branches of the arts. Finally, van Aelst not only depicts the costly silver objects but he fully reinvents them, altering the design and changing the purpose. In this way, van Aelst displays his skill and creativity not only as a painter, but as a silversmith.

¹³⁶ Although I have not yet been able to, I intend to consult the volume published by Christian van Vianen in 1650 of silver designs “Constighe Modellen van verscheyden silvere Vaten, en andere sinnighe wercken” a copy of which is held at the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. It is my hope that this object, or at the very least objects similar to this one, will appear amongst the designs pictured there. It is also striking to note that this book of designs was published in 1650, meaning that an artist like van Aelst who may not have had the means to own one of these elaborate silver objects could certainly have consulted such a book for inspiration.

The notion of the reproductive image is one that clearly plays a distinctive role in the work of Willem van Aelst. Throughout this study we have seen van Aelst altering and adjusting his images by reducing, mirroring, focusing and ultimately transforming. Whether the images are exact copies, slight variations or reinvented originals, the challenges and the implications remain the same. The paintings suggest an artist who constantly reevaluated the manner in which he approached his craft, finding new and different ways to compose and reinvent not only his work but his own self-image. The notion that the production of an endless stream of original paintings and not simply a series of copies signaled an artist with great skill and inventiveness is clearly one that struck a chord with van Aelst. That his final “reproductive” example casts him not only in the role of painter but also of silversmith indicates that he was aware of the implications of his work and actively sought to challenge the boundaries of his genre and his role. It is clear that rather than causing people to ask “which came first?” he hoped to cause people to ask How? and Why? and perhaps even How much?

Volume II

Chapter Five: A Hand Full of Wit: van Aelst's Virtuosity

Here sweet spring appears in wintertime.
 Nature, who stupefies with her brush all who paint,
 Goes into decline out of vexation now that she sees this
 Aurora, set aside your covering of roses from your head.
 Here roses grow which surpass your coiffure.
 So van Aelst through art becomes renowned the world over.
 One ought to extol him who has overcome others.
 His hand, full of wit, painted the petals of these flowers
 With a splendor that will never wither.
 The foliage that endures heat and cold will last forever.
 Lady Venus will exchange her garland for this growth;
 In order to show off the leaves when she makes merry;
 Or when she charmingly contests the hand of Mars.
 The content of paintings is the adornment of ladies.

This poem by Jan Vos was originally printed in 1662 in the collection of his writings, *Alle de Gedichten* and then re-appeared almost sixty years later at the close of Houbraken's biography of van Aelst.¹ Titled simply *Bloemen door van Aalst geschildert* (Flowers painted by van Aelst) this poem, along with a number of others, was written by Vos in response to the collection of paintings in the home of Jan Jacobsz Hinlopen, the wealthy Amsterdam cloth merchant.² The other paintings described include works by Rembrandt, Jan Lievens, and Peter Paul Rubens.³ To be recognized among such august company, the flower still life by van Aelst would have been a substantial painting indeed. Given the date of 1662, as well as the wealth of the patron, it seems quite likely that the

¹ Vos, *Alle*. 566-567.

² For further information on Jan Jacobsz. Hinlopen, who was married to Leonora Huydecoper, the daughter of the burgemeester of Maarsseveen, Joan Huydevoper, see Judith van Gent, "Portretten van Jan Jacobsz Hinlopen en zijn familie door Gabriël Metsu en Bartholomeus van der Helst," *Oud Holland* 112, no. 2/3 (1998).

³ Vos, *Alle*. 565-567.

painting Vos was writing on was the large 1659/60 flower still life by van Aelst now located in the Michaelis Collection in Cape Town (figure 86).

One of the central themes of Vos's poem is the conquering power of van Aelst's art. The flowers that van Aelst has painted and that Jan Vos describes are cast as the very embodiment of Spring. Indeed, van Aelst's image is so powerful that it defeats Nature herself, whose creations normally cause painted work to pale by comparison. Yet so great are van Aelst's creative powers that nature is not the sole casualty. Death, which normally claims the transient beauty of actual flowers, is defeated by van Aelst's work which is painted "with a splendor that will never wither." Both Venus and Aurora set aside their wreaths and garlands in order to adorn themselves with van Aelst's flowers. Vos even implies that Venus would use van Aelst's flowers as she "charmingly contests the heart of Mars," suggesting that they hold the power to arrest war.

These claims that Vos makes for van Aelst's work are, of course, metaphorical in nature. Indeed, the form that the poem takes, and the comparisons that Vos makes are entirely conventional. The themes of painting conquering death and nature relate intimately to Vos's major poem *Zeege der Schilderkunst* (Triumph of Painting), written in 1654. Vos's introduction to this text initially describes the ravages of death on the human race and then presents the art of painting in the following heroic manner:

Now comes Art, armed with her colors,
And her choicest brushes, to do away with the grave.
She paints the people from the life.
In this way one protects everything that lives from eternal death.

This blessing serves nature in the world's womb.
The Art of Painting beats time and death.⁴

These themes are found in numerous seventeenth-century Dutch art theoretical texts such as the work of Karel van Mander, Philips Angel and others. Yet despite the conventionality of the poem and its themes, Vos's words about van Aelst's painting retain their force and import.

Among his standard metaphors, Vos also makes notable claims for the work of van Aelst. In lines six through nine Vos writes

So van Aelst through art becomes renowned the world over.
One ought to extol him who has overcome others.
His hand, full of wit, painted the petals of these flowers
With a splendor that will never wither.

Line six implies not only knowledge of van Aelst's travels, but also of the respect they garnered him. In fact, van Aelst's popularity was not limited to Amsterdam. He had great success in France and Italy as well, and the poem implies a certain prestige associated with such a foreign reputation. And once again, Vos carefully notes that it was the power of his art that garnered him his renown. Line seven notes how van Aelst succeeded over other artists, implying a level of rivalry and competition that must have existed in some form in seventeenth-century Amsterdam. Perhaps van Aelst's prideful boasting, which Houbraken pointedly describes earlier in his biography, was not only warranted but also necessary in the competitive artistic culture and market of Amsterdam. Lines eight and nine are probably the most revealing, however. We can read them as a single sentence,

⁴ Gregor J. M. Weber, *Der Lobtopos des 'lebenden' Bildes: Jan Vos und sein "Zeege der Schilderkunst" von 1654* (Hildesheim: 1991), 256.

the most intriguing phrases being Vos's description of van Aelst's hand as "full of wit," literally *vol geesten*. The word *geesten* here is particularly notable, because according to van Mander, *geest* is a fundamental quality of good painting. It is a quality, van Mander suggests, that cannot be learned or obtained, but something an artist can only be born with, and without it, an aspiring artist would be better off choosing another profession.⁵ *Geest* is also intimately related to the Italian term *fantasia*. Much has been written in Italian art history about the role of *fantasia* in relation to painting, yet several key concepts can be distilled.

Fantasia can be roughly equated with *invenzione* or invention.⁶ It was associated both with the senses and with illusion, as well as with the grotesque.⁷ And yet, *fantasia* also implied a degree of judgment that placed it above the senses.⁸ Michelangelo, for instance, noted that sometimes it is more appropriate for a painter to use his *fantasia* to paint something that doesn't exist, a monstrosity, as opposed to something which does, no matter how pleasing, for the human eye delights in variation and sometimes seeing that which is not there.⁹ Indeed, long before Michelangelo Cennino Cennini viewed *fantasia* as a tool, as the science of painting, writing that painting demands fantasy in order to uncover and depict that which is not there.¹⁰ This notion is intimately related to

⁵ Mander, *Grondt*. Vol. 2, 556.

⁶ David Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). discusses *fantasia* extensively. For the equation of *fantasia* with *invenzione* see page 103.

⁷ Summers, *Michelangelo*. 108

⁸ Summers, *Michelangelo*. 128

⁹ Summers, *Michelangelo*. 135-6. The statement that Michelangelo made can be found in Francisco de Hollanda, *Four Dialogues on Painting*, trans. Aubrey F. G. Bell (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1979). 60-62.

¹⁰ Summers, *Michelangelo*. 133.

Philips Angel's pronouncement that a painter must use the "power of the seemingly real" to "conquer and capture the eyes of art lovers".¹¹ Clearly, then, *geest*, or *fantasia* is the means by which such a victory might be achieved. The attribution of such a quality to van Aelst's hand is therefore highly significant. It implies a degree of skill and ability of which any painter would be envious. It should also be noted here that the term "hand" that Vos uses seems deliberately ambiguous in this context. Hand could refer to the physical hand of van Aelst, yet it could also refer to the character of his work, or his personal style. Thus the quality of *geest* is ascribed not solely to the style in which van Aelst paints, but also, and perhaps most significantly, it refers to his physical being. Thus, *geest*, the quality that van Mander suggests an artist can only be born with and not learn by practicing, is in the very body of van Aelst.

Accordingly, this poem by Jan Vos is an excellent place to begin considering the themes of artistic virtuosity and artistic self-consciousness in the work of van Aelst. A number of different motifs or qualities in van Aelst's oeuvre bear on these notions. Among these is a small group of still lifes containing self-portraits reflected in *roemers*, all executed in the same year. The section on this small group will examine their isolation, date of execution and larger implications. In the same year that this group of reflected self-portraits was executed, van Aelst also altered the form of his signature. In the previous chapter we considered his use of the Italian version of his first name; this section will discuss the connotations in Dutch culture of the elaborate calligraphic form his signature took. The subsequent section will consider the place and evidence of artistic

¹¹ Sluijter, "Introduction." 9. Angel, "Praise." Page 244 of the article, page 40 in the original text.

rivalry within the oeuvre of van Aelst, as is appropriate for van Aelst's purportedly boastful nature. Finally, the chapter will interpret van Aelst's unique fish paintings as paradoxical encomia, a theme that builds upon Vos's description of van Aelst's hand being *vol geesten*.

The Man in the Mirror: van Aelst Reflecting on Himself

The reflected self portrait is perhaps one of the most self-conscious motifs that a still life painter can include in a painting. It is the insertion of a visual clue that undermines the fiction of the isolated, rarefied space depicted in the painting.¹² With the reflected self-portrait, a painter not only acknowledges his or her own presence, but also makes the viewer of the painting aware of it as well. Frequently these inclusions are subtle and only found after careful study of a painting. Their discovery is like a revelation, for it is one of the most direct insertions of the physical presence of a painter that can be accomplished in the genre of still life. This is made even more striking by the fact that when the viewer discovers this portrait, the painter, although reflected, is no longer there. Thus the self-portrait has the added effect of shattering the illusion that the painter has created, for when the viewer discovers the reflected self portrait, the painter is clearly no longer present, disbelief is no longer suspended and the painting becomes a

¹² The notion that still lifes were deliberately crafted to appear both isolated and elevated from normal space is found in Goedde, "Little World." 37. Celeste Brusati discusses the notion of the artistic self-portrait within the genre of still life in her article Brusati, "Stilled." Reflected self-portraits are also discussed at some length in Stoichita, *Self-Aware*. 215-226.

representation.¹³ In this way, one can argue that the painter is actually remarkably present because this process draws attention to the mimetic results of his artistry.

Many artists experimented with the motif of the reflected self-portrait, perhaps one of the earliest and most famous being Jan van Eyck (figure 93). Within the field of Netherlandish still life, perhaps the most well known practitioners of this device are Clara Peeters and Abraham van Beyeren (Figures 94 & 95). In this respect, van Aelst's paintings are building on a long artistic tradition. In addition to the distinct associations that the reflected self-portrait carries, van Aelst's mirrored self-portraits are also significant because of their date, their rarity, the nature of the portraits themselves and their context.

The three self-portraits are all dated in the year 1659, when Willem van Aelst had been back from Italy less than two years. The first documents that place him in Amsterdam date to early 1657.¹⁴ His Dutch production had been grand up to this point, mirroring the character and sometimes the scale of his paintings for the Medici. And yet, in a 1659 document we learn that he was renting rooms along the Bloemgracht in which to paint.¹⁵ Although his financial status is difficult to determine at this point, it is sufficient to note that he was still renting rooms and the neighborhood in which he was painting was the *Looiersbuurt* or tanners neighborhood.¹⁶ Therefore 1659 found van Aelst newly returned, attempting to make a name for himself through his elaborate, finely

¹³ Brusati, "Stilled." 173.

¹⁴ The document regards the death of his Uncle and teacher, Evert van Aelst. See chapter two for more details.

¹⁵ See chapter two for further discussion of this curious passage.

¹⁶ Spies et al., *Canals*. 41, 232.

finished pictures, but perhaps not meeting with as much initial success as his pride might like. Perhaps because of this, in three separate paintings, all dated 1659, Willem van Aelst pictured himself as a shadowy reflection in the curved side of a *roemer* embedded within an elaborate still life (Figures 32, 68 & 96). These are the only occurrences of the reflected self-portrait in van Aelst's oeuvre known to me. The fact that they all appear clustered together at this pivotal moment in his career, suggests some greater significance than purely mimetic description. These three paintings can be viewed as visual statements of van Aelst's artistic identity at a moment when van Aelst was still attempting to establish himself in the teeming and competitive Amsterdam art market. Such images bespeak an artist who is confident in his skills, and seeks not only to demonstrate his artistry through finely wrought paintings but also to express to his audience his awareness of his own role in the invention and creation of his work.

Unlike the reflected self-portraits in the work of Clara Peeters, the images of van Aelst in these three still lifes are relatively indistinct. The clearest of the three is found in the picture located in Antwerp (figures 32 & 97). All three reflections are suggestive of a seated man, at work, looking directly at the *roemer*, which in reflection, gives the impression that he is peering out of the picture at the viewer of his painting. In traditional artist self-portraits of the more standard type, the face and attributes of the painter are typically clearly and purposefully rendered. This unequivocal quality, coupled with the very nature of the genre of the self-portrait, suggests an undeniable pride.¹⁷ Van Aelst's

¹⁷ Eric Jan Sluijter, "The Painter's Pride: The Art of Capturing Transience in Self-Portraits from Isaac van Swanenburgh to David Bailly," in *Modelling the Individual: Biography and Portrait in the Renaissance*,

features, in contrast are obscure and even indistinct. Despite this imprecision, though, the intention behind the hazy features is perfectly clear, and the pride expressed by van Aelst is present in equal measure. In fact, because the self-portrait is not overt, but must be sought out by the viewer, it draws attention to the very artistry that has been the source of his success. The more subtle self-portraits are arguably greater statements of artistic merit and skill than their more traditional cousins.

An easel is visible in at least one of the three reflected portraits, and in the others the figure of van Aelst is clearly at work at his profession, with hand poised to record some detail (figure 98). Once again, this is unlike many traditional artist self-portraits which were often designed to aggrandize the artists, sometimes casting them in the role of gentlemen and distancing them from their manual labors.¹⁸ Jan Vos's poem about van Aelst explicitly refers to the work of van Aelst's hand and to the fact that his great reputation is due to the power of his art. As noted, the embedded nature of the reflected self-portrait draws more attention to the facture of the painting. Van Aelst's identity does not reside in his facial features or his social aspirations, but rather in his brushstrokes.¹⁹

A closer examination of the paintings in which the reflected self-portraits have been embedded illuminates a number of subtle allusions to artistry as all three paintings share a remarkable number of features. The compositions are strikingly similar, featuring

ed. Karl Enekel, Betsy de Jong-Crane, and Peter Liebrechts (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998). In his essay, Sluiter discusses this quality of hubris inherent in the self-portrait. The classic source on artist self-portraits is: Hans-Joachim Raupp, *Untersuchungen zu Künstlerbildnis und Künstlerdarstellung in den Niederlanden im 17. Jahrhundert* (Hildesheim; New York: G. Olms, 1984).

¹⁸ Brusati, "Stilled." 172-175. Brusati makes this point about Clara Pecters, however it can be applied across reflected self-portraits in the context of still life paintings, as they by necessity depict the painter at work.

¹⁹ Brusati, "Stilled." 173-174.

a central *roemer* (elevated in the Berlin painting) on a draped table surrounded by fruit. Two of the paintings also depict an auricular silver pitcher familiar from van Aelst's and Willem Kalf's earlier paintings. Two of the paintings depict peaches, and the Berlin painting, the most elaborate of the three, also contains a shell and an elaborate *bekerschroef*. The centrality of the *roemer*, and the reflection it contains, particularly in the Antwerp painting, is reminiscent of the compositional focus created by Madonna paintings with garlands of flowers by artists such as Jan Bruegel the elder (Figure 99). Later paintings by Jan Davidsz de Heem adopt this same motif for less devotional purposes, but similar compositional effect (figure 100). The compositional form common to these three paintings endows them with a monumentality and an iconic quality that significantly emphasizes the central element, the *roemer*, which draws the viewer's attention to the portrait in the glass vessel and the artist's role as maker of the work.

There are a number of other elements these paintings contain that also address the theme of artistic self-consciousness. Because of its distinctive signature, we can be fairly certain that the earliest of the three 1659 paintings is the work that was with Johnny van Haeften in 2002.²⁰ One notable object depicted in the painting is the rock crystal pocket watch with a blue ribbon in the left foreground. This element, which can be viewed as virtually a signature element for the mature van Aelst, is not simply a luxury object, although that is one of its connotations. Pocket watches and other *vanitas* motifs also

²⁰ This painting is signed calligraphically, but unlike the other two paintings in the group which are signed using the Italian form of van Aelst's first name, this painting is signed W.v Aelst, an earlier form of his signature. Because van Aelst was so fastidious and remarkably consistent in the signing and dating of his work, as well as in the form his signature took, we can use it as a fairly reliable means of establishing a sequence of execution.

allude to the passage of time. Time in the context of a still life painting, however, can be viewed not only as a reference to mortality, but also as a reference to the time the painter has spent on the creation of his still life.²¹ Effectively, the pocket watch alludes to the hours van Aelst has spent carefully crafting the finely polished surfaces of this painting. This is made all the more explicit by the fact that the easel at which van Aelst works is clearly reflected in the *roemer* that is the central focus of the composition. The pocket watch, moreover, can also refer to the ability of art to stop time, something Vos's poem refers to explicitly. Only a truly talented artist possessed such abilities, and in including the pocket watch, van Aelst makes his opinion evident. The pocket watch in the context of the painting, therefore, is a meditation on the work and the skill of van Aelst.

Luxury objects also play important roles in two of these paintings. As noted before, both the van Haefen painting and the Berlin painting contain the same elaborate auricular silver pitcher by Christiaan van Vianen (figure 69). The Berlin painting also contains a finely worked *bekerschroef* by the Hague silversmith Andries Grill, the original of which is in the collection of the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague today (figure 101). At their most fundamental level, these silver objects function much like the pocket watch. In reality, they are elaborate objects, of high value that were the result of great skill and many hours of careful work by highly talented silversmiths. Van Aelst's inclusion of these objects encourages the viewer to meditate on his paintings and their relation to the silver artifacts. Like the carefully crafted silver objects, van Aelst's

²¹ Julie Berger Hochstrasser, "Goede Dingen Willen Tijd Hebben: Time as a Meditation on Painting in Dutch Still Life of the seventeenth century," in *Symbols of Time in the History of Art*, ed. Christian Heck and Kristen Lippincott (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2002), 129-130.

paintings are the result of great skill and many hours of work and training. The presence of the objects also alludes to a degree of artistic rivalry. To include the silversmith's creations in his paintings, van Aelst not only acknowledges their artistry, but he also in effect boasts that his own skill is all the greater, because he is able to reproduce the objects in paint. Thus both the pocket watch and the elaborate silver objects, coupled with the reflected self-portraits, can be viewed as motifs of self-conscious artistry that reveal much about van Aelst's character and his abilities.

These paintings also contain an additional motif that draws our attention to van Aelst's deliberate assertion of artistic skill. All three paintings conspicuously depict luscious bunches of grapes, and two of the paintings, the works in Antwerp and Berlin, include background curtains. Grapes are commonly found in van Aelst's fruit pieces, so their presence is not unusual, although in these paintings they are not only more abundant but also more compositionally significant than is normally the case. The motif of a background curtain is only present in a very small number of van Aelst's paintings, so that its juxtaposition with both the grapes and the reflected self portraits in these paintings suggests that the concurrence of these motifs is not coincidental. These objects may well allude to the fabled story told by Pliny the Elder of the competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasios, which could have been known to van Aelst through Karel van Mander's *Schilder-boeck*.²² In the tale, Zeuxis deceives birds with his painting of grapes, and then Parrhasios deceives Zeuxis with his illusionistic curtain, resulting in the judgment that

²² Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck* (Haarlem: Paschier van Wesbusch, 1604). 69r, 265rv.

Parrhasios was the better artist because his illusion fooled not just birds but Zeuxis himself.

Seen in the context of the heightened illusionism of these pictures and the self-portraits that they contain, the conspicuous grapes and curtains may well subtly allude to the virtuosity not only of Zeuxis and Parrhasios but also by extension of van Aelst himself. Perhaps the picture that exemplifies this dynamic best is the Antwerp painting, which feels very much as if it is set on a stage, with the curtain drawn back to reveal an illusion that has been pushed into the foreground. The complexity of the reflection in the Antwerp *roemer* heightens the painterly tour de force. Not only does van Aelst paint himself peering out at the viewer, but he also paints an elaborate enfilade of reflected windows with a cityscape visible through them. This masterful display of *reflexy-const* (the art of reflection), as Karel van Mander termed it, is designed to dazzle as it appears to open up a tunnel of space in the center of the painting.²³ Indeed, *reflexy-const*, as van Mander saw it, was fundamental to the nature of art because it duplicated the action of nature herself.²⁴ The masterful display of *reflexy-const* therefore, was a demonstration of an artist's mastery over nature. In this respect, through the use of *reflexy-const*, a still life painting could attain the same success and praise as a history painting because the skill of *reflexy-const* was concerned with description of nature and the creation of an illusion.²⁵ This illusion, with its self-conscious inclusion of van Aelst's portrait, is the ultimate

²³ Mander, *Grondt*. Chapter 7; Walter S. Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon: Karel van Mander's Schilder-Boeck* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). 70-77.

²⁴ Melion, *Shaping*. 70

²⁵ Melion, *Shaping*. 72

statement of artistic virtuosity. Not only is it a masterful creation, but it is also a statement about artistic ability and self-confidence.

These three still lifes, with their reflected self-portraits, are one of the opening salvos in van Aelst's attempt to forge an artistic identity in his newly adopted city of Amsterdam. Their conspicuous timing, so shortly after van Aelst's return, suggest complicated motives. Considerations such as the compositional structure, the presence of elaborate auricular silver and the pocket watch are coupled with the suggestive presence of grapes and curtains. Individually, all of these elements are not exceptional, but concurrently, they create a complex web of implications. Van Aelst is using these paintings to communicate his exceptional virtuosity, moreover, he intimates his awareness of his own abilities and willingness to capitalize on them. In this manner, van Aelst truly begins his career in Amsterdam.

The Writing on the Tablecloth

The 1659 Antwerp painting discussed in the previous section contains yet another layer of significance in terms of the understanding of Willem van Aelst (figure 32). Unlike the 1659 picture formerly with Johnny van Haefen (figure 96), the Antwerp painting is the first work to be signed with the Italian form of van Aelst's first name in full and very elaborate calligraphy (figure 102). The artist's choices regarding the form of

his signature make it, like other features of the picture, an indicator of van Aelst's artistic identity and goals.

The rich velvet tablecloth, fringed in fine, gleaming gold thread, drapes across the table on which the still life stands. One corner of the sumptuous cloth is folded over, revealing the satiny underside of the fabric. Nestled in this conspicuous corner, outlined by a forest of golden threads, is the first appearance of Willem van Aelst's new signature. It is large and prominent, and written on two lines because of the narrow space afforded by the tablecloth corner. The signature is not only written in the same yellow-toned paint used to describe the gold thread, but the delicate loops and curves of the signature are marked by the same highlights and paint effects as the threads themselves, as if to suggest that it, too were composed of gold. Given the reflected self-portrait that this painting contains, the prominence and remarkable qualities of this signature are surely very deliberate. It is as if the debut of the new presentation of his name required a context of heightened elegance and an equally elegant form.

The device of the conspicuous artists' signature was a traditional means of asserting artistic identity and toying with visual conventions since at least the early Renaissance. Signatures appeared on walls (Figure 103), on casually angled *cartellini* tucked into frames and fastened to surfaces (Figure 104), as well as in fictive engraved inscriptions (Figure 105).²⁶ Jan Steen was known to paint his signatures as if they were

²⁶ There are a small number of sources that consider artist signatures as self-conscious devices, an area of study that calls out for further exploration. For Venetian signatures see Louisa C. Matthew, "The Painter's Presence: Signatures in Venetian Renaissance Pictures," *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 4 (1998). Although the book is on American artists, there is a substantial introductory essay on historical precedents in John

carved into stone, a punning interpretation of his own last name.²⁷ Although not illusionistic in nature, perhaps one of the most notable signatures in the Dutch Republic was Rembrandt's, which shifted from the early monogram RHL, to a self-conscious use of only his first name.²⁸ This tradition continued both up to and long beyond van Aelst's lifetime, and his signatures were not in themselves isolated or unique. Nevertheless, they bear consideration as they represent a level of awareness and deliberate calculation that illuminates his approach to his paintings and to his artistic persona.

The history of the form of van Aelst's signature is relatively easy to track as he was notably consistent in the way he signed his paintings. The earliest form of his signature is the simplest (Figure 106), simply WVAelst and the year. The W and the V are written in uppercase block letters, sometimes a period is visible after each letter, but not always. The "Aelst" is usually written in a simple, lowercase cursive script. The date after his name is sometimes underlined, and in a few examples he writes A^o before the year of the painting. The signature generally appears in standard places such as table edges, along the edges of tablecloths, or sometimes in one of the lower corners or even the lower center of the painting. This form of his signature appears in his earliest

Wilmerding, *Signs of the Artist: Signatures and Self-Expression in American Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003). 1-37.

²⁷ Mariët Westerman, *The Amusements of Jan Steen: Comic Painting in the Seventeenth-Century* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1997). 229-230.

²⁸ H. Perry Chapman, *Rembrandt's Self-Portraits: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). 60, 63. This phenomenon and the physical forms that Rembrandt's name took are explored at great length in Ann Jensen Adams, "Rembrandt [ecit]. The Italic Signature and the Commodification of Artistic Identity," in *Künstlerischer Austausch = Artistic Exchange*, ed. Thomas W. Gaehtgens (Berlin: Akademie, 1993).

paintings, persists through the pictures he executed in Italy and appears for the last time in paintings executed in 1657, including the breakfast piece in Copenhagen (Figure 66).

The next incarnation of van Aelst's signature appears in 1658 and only occurs in two paintings, a flower piece and a hunt piece (Figures 79, 51). The signature is difficult to make out as it is painted on a dark ground in both pictures and over time the signature has receded into the background (figure 107).²⁹ The signature ranges across three lines and includes his name fully written out in elaborate calligraphy, followed by a line reading "alias de. _____" and yet another line reading "A^o 1658" with the number five written above the number twenty-six with a line between the two of them. This last number most likely indicates the date, May 26th.³⁰ To the right of all three lines is a small drawing of what looks to be a stick figure. It has been suggested that the portion of the signature reading "alias de" (alias the...) could refer to this little stick figure. It has been further hypothesized that this could refer to a nickname of the kind bestowed on foreign artists by the *Bentvueghels*. It was customary for members of the Roman *Bentvueghels*, the society of Dutch and Flemish painters in Rome, to receive a nickname when, after an elaborate initiation ceremony, they were inducted into the group. Thereafter, artists would be known to other members of the group by the pseudonym.³¹ The new names frequently played on some trait of the artist, physical or

²⁹ Figure 107 is my rendering of van Aelst's signature from the Rijksmuseum hunt piece as the original is impossible to photograph owing to the dark background on which it is painted.

³⁰ The presumed indication of the date of May 26 only appears in the hunt piece. It is unknown whether it is also present in the flower piece.

³¹ Levine, "The Bentvueghels "Bande Académique"." 207-209. describes not only the initiation process, but also the presentation of the new pseudonym.

otherwise. For instance, Otto Marseus van Schrieck, famed for painting forest floor paintings, was called *snuffelaar* because it was suggested that he was always crawling about looking for new specimens or subjects to paint.³² The name suggested for this stick figure in recent literature is *vogelverschrikker* (scarecrow). There is, however, no evidence either that *vogelverschrikker* was van Aelst's *Bent* nickname, or, for that matter, that he was a member of the *Bent*.³³ In his classic text on the *Bentvueghels*, J. G. Hoogewerff includes a listing of seventy-two *Bentvueghel* nicknames for which the artists are not now known.³⁴ While *vogelverschrikker* is not on this list, it does include one name that is remarkably suggestive of van Aelst's personality. The name *Kemphaan* translates not only as a gamecock, but can also be interpreted figuratively as a hothead, or someone who easily gets into disputes. Certainly, given the descriptions of his violent behavior, as well as the frequent subject matter of his hunt still lifes, this nickname is doubly appropriate. The only element that is incongruous with this nickname is the stick figure that features in the 1658 signature, unless it can be viewed as a man leaning against a wall in a self-assured manner. The little stick figure in the signature, therefore, remains frustratingly inscrutable. These two 1658 signatures mark the first appearance of

³² G. J. Hoogewerff, *De Bentvueghels* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952). 139.

³³ Chong and Kloek, eds., *Still-Life Paintings From the Netherlands 1550-1720*. 242. The entry clearly notes that the notion of a nickname is purely speculative. Hoogewerff, *Bentvueghels*. Contains no mention of van Aelst, and the article by Henk van de Schoor, "Bentvueghel Signatures in Santa Costanza in Rome," *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome XXXVIII*, no. 3 (1976). re-examines graffiti and inscriptions made on the walls of Santa Costanza in Rome. These inscriptions of names are effectively a recording of members of the *Bentvueghels*, because, after the induction into the group it was customary for new members to scratch their name and alias into the wall. Van Aelst's name is not to be found amongst these inscriptions which are unfortunately in a very poor state of preservation.

³⁴ Hoogewerff, *Bentvueghels*. 147. Hoogewerff notes that the list originally comes from the dissertation by C. Hofstede de Groot *Arnold Houbraken und seine "Groote Schouburgh" kritisch beleuchtet*, den Haag, 1893, 414.

full and elaborate calligraphy in the signature of van Aelst, a significant point to which we will return later in this discussion.

In the 1659 painting, formerly with Johnny van Haefen (Figure 96), Willem van Aelst used the signature WVAelst 1659, in a less elaborate script than he used in the 1658 paintings. This 1659 signature is the last time van Aelst uses the Dutch form of his first name.

As noted in relation to the 1659 Antwerp painting, the new form of van Aelst's signature abandons Willem in favor of Guill.mo, and is written in elaborate calligraphy (Figure 102). This is the first and most elaborate occurrence of a signature that retains the calligraphic script first seen in 1658 but eventually settles into a more even, regular form (Figure 108). This final version of van Aelst's signature usually appears in standard places on his paintings, along the bottom or top edges, or sometimes just below tabletops. One of the most notable qualities of this final signature is its relatively large size. For instance, the 1674 *Fruit Still Life with a Mouse*, in a private collection, is approximately 29.7 x 24.4 cm in size, a painting of relatively intimate scale (Figure 49). Van Aelst's signature is nonetheless centered along the top edge of the painting and is approximately two to three centimeters high, and about eight centimeters in length, a remarkably large size for such a small painting. If size is any measure of importance, van Aelst clearly values his identity as a painter very highly and is concerned that his production be easily identifiable.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of this final form of the signature, and indeed, of all van Aelst's signatures after 1658, is the calligraphic script in which they are written. The script adds an elegance to his signature that suits the fine and polished nature of his painting technique. However the significance of van Aelst's choice of such elaborate calligraphy for his signature is not purely aesthetic. Indeed, on official documents, van Aelst's signature is very far from the delicate curving script visible in his paintings (Figure 109). Van Aelst's choice of calligraphy as a form for his painted signatures therefore, was deliberate and self-conscious. Indeed, calligraphy in Dutch seventeenth-century culture was not simply an elaborate form of writing, but carried with it a whole host of associations about class, learning and sophistication. Moreover, calligraphy had engendered a vigorous culture of competition and refinement and its artful execution was held to be an act of creation on par with poetry.³⁵ It is little wonder that van Aelst, whose awareness and deliberate exploitation of such social preoccupations has been noted before, would take advantage of such a rich opportunity for personal aggrandizement.

In the Renaissance, handwritten and printed texts appeared in four primary forms, Gothic, a gothic cursive called Civilité, all capital Roman, and rounded Italic.³⁶

³⁵ Karel van Mander makes this assertion regarding professional calligraphers in *De Nederduytsche Helicon* (1610). This discussion can be found in Adams, "Rembrandt." 585 Adams also makes a similar assertion of deliberate self-fashioning for Rembrandt's italic signature. I follow her model in my discussion and would argue that van Aelst is even more fitting as his signature truly begins to approximate some of the *schoonschrift* that was so highly praised.

³⁶ Adams, "Rembrandt." 584; Ann Jensen Adams, "'Der Sprechende Brief' Kunst des Lesens, Kunst des Schreibens: Schriftkunde und schoonschrift in den Niederlanden im 17. Jahrhundert," in *Leselust Niederländische Malerei von Rembrandt bis Vermeer*, ed. Sabine Schulze (Stuttgart: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1993). 72. A thorough discussion of these different forms, particularly in light of engraving, can be found in Amy Namowitz Worthen, "Calligraphic Inscriptions on Dutch Mannerist Prints," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 42-43 (1991-1992). See especially pages 263-266.

Interestingly the latter, rounded italic, actually was adopted by scribes at the Vatican in the mid fifteenth-century, and was also called chancery cursive because it became the official script for papal correspondence. It was favored because of the rapid manner in which it enabled the scribes to write.³⁷ Therefore the name “italic” or the notion of an “Italian hand” derives from the country in which the script originated and was associated with the Latin language and its connotations of learning and education.³⁸

This style of writing and its further refinement eventually made its way north, and was heralded by publications such as the extravagant *Spiegel der Schrijfkonste* (Mirror of Calligraphy) published by Jan van de Velde in 1605 in Rotterdam. This volume was the most well known, influential and elaborate of such books celebrating and providing examples of fine writing. The title page of van de Velde’s book places the italic script (in which van de Velde’s name is written) in the context of both Roman (the block lettering) and Gothic (the central section) lettering (Figure 110).

Calligraphy soon grew to an elevated status in the Netherlands. Delft inventories note examples of fine calligraphy that were framed and hung on walls as objects to be admired.³⁹ Fine penmanship became an essential part of elementary curricula, with writing contests given to encourage good form. Yet, the ability to write in proper calligraphy was not a universal skill by any means. In fact, its use signaled an individual of learning and refinement. Theoretical writings about penmanship frequently boast about

³⁷ Worthen, "Calligraphic." 263-265

³⁸ Ben Broos, "The "O" of Rembrandt," *Simiolus* 4 (1970). 150-151.

³⁹ Montias, *Artists*. 229. Noted also in Adams, "Rembrandt." 586.

the noble origins of writing.⁴⁰ Indeed, Karel van Mander himself calls calligraphy, or *schoonschrijfkunst*, the sister of Pictura.⁴¹

Contests were held between writing masters from across the United Provinces to determine the most talented practitioner. In such contests elaborate virtuosity and artful display were the norm, so much so that the words of the text that was written were sometimes lost amongst the elaborate flourishes and embellishments.⁴² One of the most elegant displays of penmanship consisted of the creation of an image using a single, unbroken line. The results of such displays were called *pennetrekken*, and perhaps one of the most elaborate of these was the East Indiaman originally drawn by Jan van de Velde and eventually engraved in his book, *Spieghel der Schrijfkonste* (Figure 111). The high esteem in which fine penmanship was held is in evidence in the laudatory poems written on Dutch writing masters.⁴³ In such texts, the artfulness of the calligraphy masters was frequently compared with the achievements of great artists like Apelles, Zeuxis and Parrhasios. The prestige surrounding *schoonschrijfkunst* was clearly not lost on van Aelst, who appears to have adopted its practice in a deliberate and self-conscious manner.

In signing his paintings using the Italian form of his first name, van Aelst wanted to simultaneously reference his Italian training and appeal to collectors who held Italy in high esteem. The italic form of his signature (Figures 102, 107 & 108), at its most basic level, is a further reference to his Italian training, yet his adoption of the style holds much

⁴⁰ Broos, "The "O." 154.

⁴¹ Broos, "The "O." 153, note 7. Mander, *Schilder*. fol. 59.

⁴² Broos, "The "O." 153-155.

⁴³ Broos, "The "O.", provides several examples of these, 157-160.

greater significance. In signing his paintings with this elaborate, embellished script, van Aelst appropriated the prestige and elegance it carried with it. The sort of virtuosity and technical mastery apparently displayed at writing competitions would have been immensely appealing to van Aelst and would have been in agreement with his approach to painting. He thereby appealed to connoisseurs who were knowledgeable about *schoonschrijfkunst* and who would have recognized its presence in his work. In adopting the style, he intimates his refinement, his education and his artistic sophistication.⁴⁴ The concurrent adoption of the Italian form of his first name creates a complex of self-fashioning. Van Aelst, in attempting to elevate his artistic standing and identity chose to appeal to subtle social markers of learning, in the form of his calligraphic signature, and worldly sophistication in the form of his Italian first name. In this way, he supplemented his well-developed artistic ability with allusions to sophistication and international culture that would have appealed to the type of clientele he sought. Like Rubens, whose accomplishments went far beyond his formidable artistic skills, van Aelst aspired to greatness.

The Relief and the Silversmith: Artistic Rivalry

In chapter four, we briefly considered the presence of silver objects in van Aelst's paintings, noting how they alluded to the tradition of *paragone*, or rivalry between the different branches of the arts. This notion was also considered in passing in light of the

⁴⁴ Adams, "Rembrandt." Adams makes a similar claim for Rembrandt's use of the italic signature in his paintings.

sculptural friezes found beneath the ledges and tabletops of a number of van Aelst's still lifes. Given van Aelst's ambitious nature, these concepts of *paragone* and artistic rivalry are worth revisiting. Their reconsideration reveals additional layers of complexity in the composition of van Aelst's images as well as exposing the sophisticated approach he adopted to artistic identity.

Before considering van Aelst's images, it behooves us to examine the place of *paragone* in Dutch art literature. The concept of *paragone* was extensively discussed in Philips Angel's Leiden address, published in 1642 as *Lof der Schilder-konst* (Praise of Painting). Angel's speech begins with a lengthy encomium on the great painters of antiquity and their achievements. He brings the discussion to his present day by referring to Gerrit Dou as an exemplar of the manner in which the glory of past days has not diminished. Following this he states

But the sculptors, who are jealous of this, would like to claim for themselves the honor that is due us, purloining it under the pretense that they imitate life more closely than we do, which must perforce be demonstrated by a contrary argument, for our art is more excellent than theirs.⁴⁵

Clearly, rivalry between the arts was alive and well. The argument that Angel then puts forth to prove the superiority of painting over sculpture revolves around the thesis that painting is able to approach nature more closely than sculpture can. He notes that sculpture, although it results in a three dimensional form, is a lesser skill because it is

⁴⁵ Angel, "Praise." 238-239, page 23 of the original 1642 publication.

taking advantage of an existing physical mass such as a block of marble or wood.⁴⁶

Painting, on the other hand

Is far more general because it is capable of imitating nature much more copiously, for in addition to depicting every kind of creature like birds, fishes, worms, flies, spiders and caterpillars it can render every kind of metal and can distinguish between them, such as gold, silver, bronze, copper, pewter, lead and all the rest.⁴⁷

Angel then enumerates elements like fog, the rising sun and human hair that painting can depict in a manner superior to sculpture.⁴⁸ Finally, Angel also notes that the work of a sculptor is heavy, physical labor, meaning that sculptors will not be able to practice their craft effectively in old age, precisely the moment when experience ought to make them most accomplished. Naturally, according to Angel, the art of painting does not suffer from such drawbacks.⁴⁹

Angel's argument would have likely formed part of the basis for van Aelst's conception of *paragone*. Angel stresses painting's ability to produce an image where there is no physical presence. Later in his speech he calls this "the power of the seemingly real."⁵⁰ The purported superiority of painting over sculpture must have made an impression on van Aelst, for his inclusion of the sculptural friezes in his still lifes alludes to this very matter. These works go beyond a simple painting versus sculpture

⁴⁶ Angel, "Praise." 239.

⁴⁷ Angel, "Praise." 239, page 25 of the original 1642 publication.

⁴⁸ Angel, "Praise." 239.

⁴⁹ Angel, "Praise." 239.

⁵⁰ Angel, "Praise." 244. Hoyle's translation of the phrase "*schijn-eyghentlicke kracht*" is actually "seemingly real force." I have chosen to use the translation of this crucial phrase offered by Eric Jan Sluijter, which I believe more accurately captures the intent of the text. Sluijter, "Introduction." 9.

paragone, however, because the stone frieze of Diana and Actaeon appearing in five of van Aelst's extant paintings actually existed, but it was not a stone sculpture.

The scene of Diana and Actaeon depicted by van Aelst (Figure 112) was originally conceived by the immensely talented silversmith, Paulus van Vianen, who, as noted above, worked at the court of Rudolph II in Prague.⁵¹ It first appeared on a remarkable gold, eighteen-and-a-half inch high, covered cup he created in 1610 for Heinrich Julius, Duke of Braunschweig-Lüneburg (Figure 113). This object is a magnificent display of Paulus van Vianen's absolute mastery of his craft. The elaborate signature on the underside of the base, which is unique within his oeuvre, proudly asserts his well deserved title: "S: Caes. M^tis aur, Paulus de viana. ultraiectensis. fe. •1610•" (Paulus van Vianen of Utrecht, goldsmith to his Imperial Majesty, made it).⁵² The covered cup is also remarkable because of the sculptural scene of Diana and Actaeon which it bears on its sides. Unusually for Paulus van Vianen, he utilized this scene twice more in his oeuvre, indicating that he must have been satisfied with its effect and execution.⁵³ It appears on a plaquette in 1612, and a large basin in 1613.⁵⁴ The scene is depicted in a typically mannerist fashion with large figures in the foreground and a host of smaller figures, actually the main protagonists of the story, depicted deeper in space.

⁵¹ The van Vianen family of silversmiths is discussed in chapter four. This frieze is first identified in relationship to the 1661 hunt piece in the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC in Molen, "Van Vianen". Vol. 1, figure 21. It is reiterated in Luijten et al., eds., *Dawn*. 512

⁵² Luijten et al., eds., *Dawn*. 509-510.

⁵³ Luijten et al., eds., *Dawn*. 510-512.

⁵⁴ Luijten et al., eds., *Dawn*. 510-512. The plaquette is in the collection of the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, and the Basin (with an accompanying ewer) is in the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Interestingly, both secondary versions of the composition appear on silver objects, as opposed to the gold lidded cup on which it was originally featured.

The effect of this in sculpture is remarkable, and speaks to the compositional skill of van Vianen. His high-relief composition was not cast, as one might expect, but was embossed, a technique requiring greater artistic skill and resulting in a more sensitive, fluid design.⁵⁵

Of the two additional occurrences of the scene of Diana and Actaeon in the oeuvre of Paulus van Vianen, the 1613 basin, which was accompanied by an elaborate ewer, bears closer examination (Figure 114). This pair of objects date to the last year of van Vianen's life, and may also be considered some of his most masterful designs.⁵⁶ The basin itself is constructed of two sheets of silver that have been bolted together so that different embossed designs could appear on each face of the basin. The inside of the basin depicts the scene familiar from the lidded cup of Diana and Actaeon, while the backside of the basin depicts Actaeon's untimely death as he is torn apart by his own hunting dogs. The ewer continues the theme set forth in on the basin and depicts Jupiter disguised as Diana and abducting Callisto, as well as Diana punishing Callisto.⁵⁷ Neither of these objects fit the traditional form of basin and ewer sets. The basin, because the raised designs appeared on both the back and front, was not intended to lie flat, nor could it have effectively held water. Moreover, the basin does not have the traditional hollow in its center which is intended to receive the foot of the ewer. In addition, the ewer was not shaped to effectively pour water. Both objects, clearly, were intended as art pieces, to be examined, viewed from all sides, and likely handled by their owner. They were

⁵⁵ Luijten et al., eds., *Dawn*. 510.

⁵⁶ Luijten et al., eds., *Dawn*. 511.

⁵⁷ Luijten et al., eds., *Dawn*. 511.

masterpieces of silverwork, ornamented with elaborate auricular designs exemplifying the very height of the style.

It is known that this remarkable pair of objects would have been in the Netherlands while van Aelst was there and likely available for van Aelst to at very least see. They were in Amsterdam as early as 1637, the same year that Servaes Cocq, an Amsterdam silversmith, made illegal copies of them, which were sold to the King of Poland. Cocq was later known to have an impression of the pieces.⁵⁸ That the set was so eagerly sought out and copied indicates a high degree of notoriety and esteem. It is even possible that plaster casts of the basin and ewer were to be found in Rembrandt's inventory.⁵⁹

Van Aelst's use of the scene originally created by Paulus van Vianen is, at its most fundamental level, a tribute to the great fame and skill of the silversmith's work and the high regard in which it was held. This is particularly the case in that van Aelst utilized the scene in five separate paintings. Yet the relationship is not nearly so simple. In light of the notion of *paragone* discussed earlier in this section, van Aelst's praiseworthy motives become clouded with a dose of hubris. In rendering the scene in paint, van Aelst demonstrates his ability to harness "the power of the seemingly real." And yet, the scene of Diana and Actaeon was originally created out of precious metal, not out of the stone in which van Aelst depicts it. Therefore, his inclusion of the frieze is not simply a demonstration of the superiority of painting over sculpture, it is a demonstration of his

⁵⁸ Luijten et al., eds., *Dawn*. 512.

⁵⁹ Luijten et al., eds., *Dawn*. 512; Molen, "Van Vianen". Vol. 2, nos. 446 and 447.

ability to entirely transform the silver object into an entirely new medium. Not only are Diana and Actaeon rendered in stone, they are also rendered in paint, a doubly virtuosic feat. Van Aelst's desire for recognition as a virtuoso artist seems to know no bounds.

Indeed, there are other examples of his competitive braggadocio. The final section of the previous chapter noted several examples of van Aelst's depiction of elaborate auricular silver objects. It also noted how he transformed these objects by depicting the same base, but inventing entirely new tops in the form of nautilus shells with and without handles, and of highly worked, shallow containers for holding salt.⁶⁰

In addition to these creative liberties, chapter two touched briefly on the 1651 *pronk* still life depicting the medal of Louis XIV originally created by the medalist Jean Warin (Figures 9 and 115). As noted, van Aelst chose to sign the painting on his depiction of the medal, in precisely the same place that Warin signed the actual medal (Figure 116). Jean Warin was a talented medalist and political figure in seventeenth-century France. His strong reputation was due as much to his technical abilities as it was to his fierce defense and maintenance of his reputation. In addition to his work as a medalist, Warin was also a painter and a sculptor.⁶¹ Warin was protective of his work, and constantly strove to advance himself, ultimately coming to hold "all of the major offices connected with the execution of the coinage, while at the same time exercising total control over the institution responsible for producing much of the coinage and all the

⁶⁰ See chapter four, figures 71 and 90.

⁶¹ An excellent biography of Warin that details his work, as well as his dogged defense of his sometimes dubious behavior, can be found in Jones, *Catalogue*. 177-187.

jetons and struck medals made in France.”⁶² He even created a marble bust of Louis XIV intended to rival that made by Bernini in 1665.⁶³ Warin’s awareness of the importance of artistic rivalry for the establishment of an artist’s reputation is easy to identify. That van Aelst, when he was working in France, chose not only to depict the medal designed by Warin, but to sign in the same place Warin originally did is a remarkable act of impudence. The role of *paragone* is clearly established in this situation, as van Aelst not only displays his proud possession of the medal, but also demonstrates the superiority of his art over Warin’s. The location of his signature is the ultimate proof of this agenda.

Artistic rivalry is a theme that fits comfortably into the oeuvre of Willem van Aelst. He addresses the traditional notion of *paragone* in his sculptural friezes that are reinterpretations of great works in gold and silver. He playfully and deliberately alters his depictions of expensive silver vessels. Finally, at a very young age, he proves his determination to surpass other artists by reproducing and altering the work of a master French medalist in the most brazen manner. Seen in this context, Houbraken’s characterization of van Aelst as a brash, boastful individual begins to appear less outlandish and overstated.

Of Dead Fish and Other “Poor and Mean Ornaments”

In his 1707 *Groot Schilderboek* Gerard de Lairese makes these observations on still life painting.

⁶² Jones, *Catalogue*. 180.

⁶³ Jones, *Catalogue*. 182.

But we must know, in the first place, what constitutes a good still life piece, since, though it be naturally penciled, nothing but a good choice can charm the senses and bring fame to the master. It is weakness to think that faded flowers should please, much less in a picture: or, who would have a piece of ordinary unripe or rotten fruit in his best room, and among a cabinet collection, seeing the life itself is so disagreeable? Such rubbish I did formerly admire; but as they only show the deformities of nature, I have no appetite for them anymore. . . . As for cabbages, carrots and turnips, as likewise codfish, salmon, herrings, smelts and such like, which are poor and mean ornaments not worthy of any apartment; he who is pleased with them may seek them in the markets.⁶⁴

Not only does he advise the reader on what constitutes a proper subject for a “good still life piece,” but he also quite clearly and unequivocally asserts what he does not consider a proper subject. Moreover, he also gives some indication of the fact that at one time, he must have favored these now rejected subjects. “Such rubbish I did formerly admire; but as they only show the deformities of nature, I have no appetite for them anymore.”⁶⁵ Indeed, when the considerable body of seventeenth-century Dutch still life paintings is examined, it becomes clear that Lairese must not have been the only individual who favored these ordinary, low subjects. They compose a particular strain within the larger genre, one that is not often remarked upon or even noted for its distinctive qualities. Willem van Aelst’s paintings generally avoid much of the subject matter that Gerard de Lairese eschewed, for the most part favoring elegantly conceived and arranged subjects. However, in addition to occasional fruits showing early signs of

⁶⁴ The original dutch text is found reprinted in Gerard de Lairese, *Groot Schilderboek* (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1969). Vol II, 260.

⁶⁵ The translation I am using comes from Lairese, *Treatise*. 179

decay, or fading flowers and leaves, there is one major subject within van Aelst's oeuvre for which de Lairese would have expressed his distaste.

Van Aelst's fish still lifes would likely have elicited the scorn expressed in de Lairese's above comments as he would have considered them "poor and mean ornaments" (Figure 90). But van Aelst's fish pieces were much more than simple depictions of fish; they operate on a more sophisticated level and, like much of van Aelst's oeuvre, they act as vehicles for the demonstration of van Aelst's considerable virtuosity. Before we consider the larger implications of de Lairese's statement, it is necessary to examine how van Aelst's distinctive fish paintings functioned and what their larger concerns were.

As discussed in chapter three, Willem van Aelst's fish paintings are distinct within the genre of fish painting. Fish paintings of a more standard type tend to be rustic in setting, either set on a rough wooden table or even outdoors on the beach, with accoutrements such as earthenware jugs, baskets and copper vessels (Figure 117). By contrast, Willem van Aelst's fish paintings are refined and elegant, presenting the fish not as a potential meal but as a glistening, sculptural mass of scales, creamy flesh and iridescent eyes. Their setting heightens this altered presentation, as van Aelst surrounds his fish with velvet cloth, elegant glassware and refined silverwork. Yet the abandonment of the trappings of market and kitchen, while significant, was not van Aelst's sole innovation.

As the characterization of his fish as sculptural masses suggests, van Aelst's fish are deliberately manipulated compositional elements that only partially correspond to real fish. Van Aelst's fish mostly retain, and indeed display, their guts, but they are never bloody as they would unquestionably be if just butchered. They have been considerably cleaned up (Figure 118).⁶⁶ Moreover, although sometimes chopped into sections in a traditional presentation, the presence of guts implies that the fish are likely not pickled (Figure 70). On a fundamental level, modifying the real appearance of newly gutted fish assists van Aelst in achieving an elegant, decorous composition despite the subject matter. Avoidance of the unseemly, however, is not the sole aim of these paintings. The frequent inclusion of elegant silver objects, such as auricular standing salts or nautilus cups inspires reflection and consideration. The folds and trailing gobs of buttery yellow herring flesh and iridescent scales are remarkably parallel to the auricular silver objects frequently placed directly behind them. In this subtle way, van Aelst introduces an undercurrent of artistic rivalry by comparing his sculptural, fishy confection with the elaborate production of a highly skilled silversmith. This juxtaposition of the ordinary, indeed the slimily ugly, and the elegant, this mimicry of expensive and carefully crafted objects in the incongruous substance of fish, is intimately related to one of the central notions common to the low and ordinary still life subjects de Lairesse derides, that is, paradox. There are further implications to be drawn out in van Aelst's fish paintings, but

⁶⁶ Opinions expressed in a series of e-mails exchanged with Dr. George Hampson, emeritus marine biologist at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts, and Dr. Donald Aubrey of the Woods Hole Group.

we must first explore the idea of paradox, along with a number of other underlying concepts in order to comprehend the theoretical basis for van Aelst's compositions.

In Dutch art the paintings of low and even ugly subjects that de Lairese describes are quite heterogeneous in nature, often seeming too disparate to form a distinct class or category of images. They range from depictions of dead fish (figure 117), to images of reptiles (figure 119), to careful representations of objects as ordinary as a glass of beer and a clay pipe (figure 120). And yet, despite this diversity, they are connected through several distinctive concerns, most notably an interest in paradox and a determination to demonstrate artistic virtuosity. The subjects of this class of still life paintings are often quite ordinary objects, hardly seeming worthy of representation, or sometimes even repulsive or unpleasant in nature. And yet despite this mundane or distasteful nature, these subjects are elevated by the painter's art to something greater than their physical worth. It is this elevation that characterizes one of the major shared aspects of these paintings, paradox. It is precisely this concept of paradox that is evoked by van Aelst's juxtaposition of herring and silver.

Although complex to define, paradox can most clearly be thought of as something inherently contradictory. It can take many different forms, from literary, to spoken, and even, as in this case, painted. One of the most familiar literary manifestations of this concept is the paradoxical encomium, a rhetorical exercise that sets about praising an unpraiseworthy or conventionally disapproved of object or concept. Ancient examples

include Lucian's praise of the fly and Ovid's praise of the nut, to name just two.⁶⁷ As a genre, paradoxical encomia were enthusiastically revived in the Renaissance, the most familiar example of these being the 1509 work by Erasmus of Rotterdam, The Praise of Folly.⁶⁸ Not only did the paradoxical encomium set about to praise something low or unpraiseworthy, it was also inherently a display of rhetorical and intellectual skill.⁶⁹ It encouraged duplicity and trickery in order to convince its erudite audience. Indeed, the audiences for these exercises were quite aware of and even receptive to the deception inherent in them.⁷⁰ To prove a rose was beautiful and praiseworthy took little imagination or skill, but to successfully and convincingly praise a gnat was the mark of a truly talented and creative speaker. In her book, Paradoxia Epidemica, Rosalie Colie writes of the paradoxical encomium:

Whatever else it is designed to do to incite its audience's wonder, the paradox dazzles by mental gymnastics, by its manipulation, even prestidigitation, of ideas, true or false.⁷¹

It is this wonder, this sense of being dazzled, that I would argue that still lifes of the low also share in. They too, in a very literal sense, are paradoxical encomia. In choosing to paint a particular subject, an artist is effectively elevating, or praising, that subject

⁶⁷ Rosalie Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966). 4. Further discussion of the ancient roots of the tradition can be found in Arthur Stanley Pease, "Things Without Honor," *Classical Philology* 21, no. 1 (1926).

⁶⁸ Colie, *Paradoxia*. 4. A good translation of this text can be found in Desiderius Erasmus, "The Praise of Folly," in *The Praise of Folly and Other Writings*, ed. Robert M. Adams (New York, London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1989).

⁶⁹ Pease, "Things." 31.

⁷⁰ Colie, *Paradoxia*. 5.

⁷¹ Colie, *Paradoxia*. 22.

through the sheer attention and care in depiction. If the subject of the painting is a low or even ugly one, the painting becomes a paradoxical encomium. Through the mastery of composition, color, light and shadow, and brushwork, the artist recreates, highlights and exalts the ordinary, in effect, praising or elevating it just as in a rhetorical paradox. The facture of the artist, visible in expressive passages of paint and artfully arranged compositions, becomes like the carefully crafted words and ideas of the orator. And just as in a paradoxical encomium, the artist is also using the opportunity to demonstrate his artistic virtuosity. The wonder incited in the audience is generated through admiration of the skill of the depiction. The fact that the objects are ordinary, makes this feat dazzling by definition. Luxurious display still lifes like those by Jan Davidsz. de Heem (Figure 121) possess inherent beauty and wonder because of their elaborate abundance and appealing subjects. Still lifes of the low or ordinary produce wonder and even beauty despite their subjects, and it is the achievement of this feat that makes them remarkable. Just as an audience was to be dazzled by the rhetorical skills of the presenter of a paradoxical encomium, so too would the viewer of a painting of a low or ugly subject be dazzled by the artistic skill of its maker. The wonder, moreover, would not only lie in the artist's technical ability, such as brushwork and composition, but also in the intellectual achievement inherent in the successful accomplishment of such a challenging subject. Thus, the group of still life paintings of the low or ugly is characterized not only by an inherently paradoxical nature, but also by an essential demonstration of artistic virtuosity.

That Willem van Aelst's fish paintings function as paradoxical encomia (Figure 90) is particularly suggested by the way in which fish, which triggered such scorn from de Lairese, are surrounded by eminently praiseworthy objects of high art like silverwork. Van Aelst's ability to paint both the low and the high, to praise both through his depiction, and indeed to juxtapose the low and the high so boldly, suggests an artist whose skills are especially deserving of esteem.⁷²

In addition to paradox and artistic virtuosity, and indeed integral to these ideas, are several other concepts that also apply to this group, including *difficultà*, *schilderachtigheid*, and an issue of presentation that tends to place the ugly in opposition to the beautiful. A close examination of each will help to further explain how they relate to and help to define still lifes of low or ugly subjects.

Difficultà is a term from Italian art theory that was most famously applied to Michelangelo by Vasari in the first edition of his *Lives*.⁷³ It essentially refers to elements within a work of art that are especially challenging to depict, and which, when done with skill or *facilità*, furnish evidence of artistic virtuosity. *Difficultà* could simply be present in one small aspect of a painting, such as an extremely foreshortened or contorted figure in the foreground of a painting.⁷⁴ Thus one small element within a painting could signal

⁷² For a discussion of these concepts in light of the work of Pieter Aertsen see Reindert L. Falkenburg, "Pieter Aertsen, Rhyparographer" (paper presented at the Rhetoric - Rhétoriciens - Rederijkers, Amsterdam, 10-13 November 1993). Falkenburg argues that Aertsen, by incorporating ostensibly "high art" subjects, like the rest on the flight to Egypt, into what can be considered still lifes of low or common subjects, is in fact creating a visual version of the paradoxical encomium. This is particularly relevant in light of van Aelst's fish paintings as he frequently combines the "low" subject of fish, with "high" or elegant objects like elaborate auricular silver.

⁷³ Summers, *Michelangelo*. 177.

⁷⁴ Summers, *Michelangelo*. 178.

artistic skill to the viewer. Indeed, the role of the viewer is key to the concept of *difficultà*, implying the need for an audience to appreciate both the efforts and the skills of the artist. *Difficultà*, moreover, is at least partly intertwined with the paradoxical encomium. Both adopt a challenging subject, and in depicting it well act as demonstrations of artistic skill. This seemingly anachronistic term, grounded as it is in Italian Renaissance art theory, does not at first appear to be directly relevant to developments in Dutch art of the seventeenth century. However, it is conceivable that artists would have known of the concept through the writings of Karel van Mander, and specifically his lives of Italian artists.⁷⁵ The concept of *difficultà* would have certainly surfaced in the life of the artist Giotto, and in the recounting of the familiar story of Giotto's "O" in which Giotto executes a drawing of a perfect "O" in response to a request for the demonstration of his skill as a draftsman.⁷⁶ The execution of a perfect "O", without the aid of compass or tools, and indeed as Vasari tells it, seemingly without effort, is a demonstration of the concept of *difficultà*, a challenging subject rendered with ease and effortless skill. Moreover, *difficultà* can be related to the concept of *sprezzatura* that was made known through Baldesar Castiglione's Book of the Courtier, a volume that was readily available in the Netherlands.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Karel van Mander's *Schilder Boek*, was first published in 1604 and contained *Karel van Mander, Het Leven der Moderne, oft Dees-Tijtsche Doorluchtighe Italiaensche Schilders* (Haarlem: 1604). For a discussion of van Mander's text in relation to Vasari's *Lives*, on which it is based see Hessel Miedema, *Karel van Manders Leven der Moderne, Oft Dees-Tijtsche Doorluchtighe Italiaensche Schilders En Hun Bron: Een Vergelijking Tussen van Mander en Vasari* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Canaletto, 1984).

⁷⁶ Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). 22-23. Stacey Sell, "Rembrandt's Draftsmanship and the Traditions of Renaissance Art" (The University of Virginia, 1993). 29. Melion, *Shaping*. 40-41.

⁷⁷ Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. Daniel Javitch (New York: 2002).

Both *difficultà* and *sprezzatura* refer to the challenging or the difficult performed with ease and effortlessness, and are entirely relevant to the successful rendering of the low or ugly in one of van Aelst's fish pieces (Figure 90). In such pictures, the element of *difficultà* emerges in the rendering of the low in an appealing manner. Like the intricacies of a contorted figure in the foreground of a renaissance painting, the fish act as a marker of artistic virtuosity whereby the artist has made the low attractive through an artful treatment of the silvery sheen of the fish in juxtaposition with the reflective quality of the silverwork. The rendering of the fish, moreover, is what makes this work distinctive, allows it to consciously display artistic virtuosity.

Difficultà also has a paradoxical aspect to it as noted above. This lies in the fact that when a work of art includes an element of *difficultà*, and that element is executed with *facilità*, that is, facility or effortlessness, the effort exerted to create the example of *difficultà* is effectively effaced, or disguised behind a façade of ease and effortless skill.⁷⁸ In other words, the ultimate goal is to create the illusion of effortlessness, what might be called *sprezzatura*, regardless of how challenging it was for the artist to create the work in the first place. The paradox lies in the fact that in order to demonstrate his skill, the artist must also simultaneously negate his skill, or hide it behind a veneer of ease. This is certainly visible in the work of van Aelst, whose smooth, effortless brushwork belied the

⁷⁸ Summers, *Michelangelo*. 178.

time and energy undoubtedly expended in their creation.⁷⁹ Paradox is inherent in this process.

The group of still lifes of the low or ugly is also intimately related to the concept of the *schilderachtig*, a term from Dutch art theory. In general, the term *schilderachtig*, ordinarily translated as picturesque or more literally as painter-like or painterly, causes some difficulty, as there is no conclusive definition for it. Indeed, the definition of *schilderachtig* changes over the course of the seventeenth-century. In fact, much of what is known about it is known through a deliberately contradictory appropriation of the word by later seventeenth-century classicizing art theory. Earlier seventeenth-century authors only occasionally use the word. Van Mander, for instance, seems to use the term primarily in relation to natural things, and with a definition that we can infer to mean painter-like or suitable for a painting.⁸⁰ Other earlier writers like Gerbrand Adriaensz. Bredero and Willem Schellinks reinforce the sense that *schilderachtig* refers to the natural, and to subjects taken from life.⁸¹ The most extensive definitions, however, emerge later in the seventeenth century from the classicizing critics of the art world, who clearly attempted appropriate the word *schilderachtig* and redefine it for their own

⁷⁹ Pousão-Smith, "Sprezzatura." In this article Pousão-Smith argues that in the Dutch interpretation *sprezzatura* was actually understood as *net* painting, indicating that viewers would have been highly cognizant of the effort expended in fine paintings such as van Aelst's. In noting that van Aelst's brushwork is invisible and that he effectively masks his efforts I do not intend to suggest that seventeenth-century viewers wouldn't have appreciated his skill because they couldn't see the traces of his work. To the contrary, I believe that the invisibility of van Aelst's brushwork is precisely the point. The almost miraculously smooth surfaces he created were intended to be marveled at, and I have no doubt that van Aelst knew this when he created his paintings.

⁸⁰ Boudewijn Bakker, "'Schilderachtig:' Discussions of a Seventeenth-Century Term and Concept," *Simiolus* 23, no. 2/3 (1995). 148-152.

⁸¹ Bakker, "Schilderachtig." 152, 154.

purposes. In order to do this, they provided definitions of what they sometimes called the “false” *schilderachtig*. These negative definitions, however problematic they may be due to their polemical character, provide the most extensive suggestions of what the word commonly meant in the last third of the seventeenth century.⁸² Jan de Bisschop, for instance, writes in his *Paradigmata* that some people unfortunately believe

that what is more *schilderachtig* and to be preferred in art is a misformed, old, wrinkled person rather than a well-formed, fresh and youthful one; a dilapidated or unsuitable building rather than a new one built according to the rules of art; a beggar and a peasant rather than a nobleman or a king; a dry, crooked and ill-clothed tree rather than a green one, thick-crowned.⁸³

What is evident in de Bisschop and in other like minded classicizing authors is the identification of what they seem to feel was a cult of the ugly. Many scholars, including Emmens and Gibson, have backed away from taking this too literally, for, as noted above, these later authors were trying to appropriate the word for their own use, consequently skewing or tainting their definitions.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, we must assume from reading these definitions and from observing the contents of paintings produced during most of the seventeenth-century, that the term *schilderachtig* seems to correspond to a

⁸² Lyckle de Vries, "Gerard de Lairese: The Critical Vocabulary of an Art Theorist," *Oud Holland* 117, no. 1/2 (2004). 83. Contains a useful summation and discussion of the concept of *schilderachtig*, particularly in light of the writing by Gerard de Lairese and other later authors.

⁸³ Bakker, "Schilderachtig." 157. Bakker notes that de Bisschop's original text came from the unpaginated preamble of the text that was dedicated to Jan Six, Ioh. Episcopus, "Aen den wel-achtbaren Heer Iohan Six, Outschepen der stadt Amsterdam," in *Paradigmata variorum artificum, voor-beelden der teken-konst van verscheide meesters* (The Hague: 1671).

⁸⁴ Walter S. Gibson, "Rustic Ruins," in *Pleasant Places: The Rustic Landscape from Bruegel to Ruisdael* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). 151. Jan Emmens, *Rembrandt en de Regels van de Kunst* (Utrecht: Haentjens Dekker & Gumbert, 1968). 129.

decided taste for the run down and dilapidated, whether it be manifest in houses, trees or even people. The difficulty for the topic at hand emerges in the fact that the term *schilderachtig* was never directly connected to still life painting. Nevertheless, enough small clues exist that seem to suggest that a use of the word in this manner would not be inappropriate. Andreas Pels, for instance, in 1681 provides us with a story about Rembrandt (seen earlier in the writings of Joachim von Sandrart) in which he recounts how the artist “scoured the entire city, on bridges and in odd corners, in the New and North markets for armor, helmets, Japanese daggers, furs and rags which he found *schilderachtig*.”⁸⁵ This particular use of the word in relation to objects, suggests that the term *schilderachtig* did not merely connote blasted trees and run down shacks, but could also be applied to elements that might be included in a still life. Moreover, Jan de Vos, the author of the poem on van Aelst and a writer known not to ascribe to classicist ideals, describes the contents of an artist’s studio in his epic poem *Zeege der Schilderkunst*, (Triumph of Painting, 1654).⁸⁶ Here he doesn’t explicitly use the word *schilderachtig*, but describes objects that correspond to those in Pels’s account of objects Rembrandt favored. He describes the interior of the studio as follows:

Here hang shields, here rusted swords, Here lies a skull,
 here a human leg. Here a lion skin is shown off, here strung
 bows. In addition there are books with old bindings. One sees

⁸⁵ Bakker, "Schilderachtig." 155. Joachim von Sandrart, *L'Accademia Todesca della architettura, scultura et pittura, oder Teutsche Academie der edelen Bau-, Bild-, und Mahlerey-Künste*, ed. A. R. Peltzer (Munich: 1925). 203.

⁸⁶ Vos’s theoretical leanings are discussed in Maria A. Schenkeveld, *Dutch Literature in the Age of Rembrandt: Themes and Ideas* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991). 124.

everywhere strange things displayed. What others have cast away here gains standing again, Art sometimes chooses unvalued things.⁸⁷

This passage is especially interesting given that Vos isn't considered a member of the highly classicizing group of authors, including de Lairese and de Bisschop.⁸⁸ Thus we can assume that his words were not shaped by the classicizing agenda to appropriate and redefine the *schilderachtig*. Especially striking is his comment that "What others have cast away here gain standing again, Art sometimes chooses unvalued things."⁸⁹ Given that the objects Vos lists conform with Pels' litany of the *schilderachtig* objects Rembrandt supposedly collected, it is especially striking that Vos refers to these objects as "cast away" and "unvalued". In the previous line he also characterizes them as *vreemd* or strange. In effect, Vos presents us with an artist's studio populated by objects termed *schilderachtig* in other passages and indicating that low, unvalued and ugly objects could have been viewed as *schilderachtig* in the seventeenth-century.

A further support of this connection between the *schilderachtig* and the low can be found in the classicizing art theorist Gerard de Lairese. De Lairese casts his descriptions of the true and false *schilderachtig* as a pair of journeys through two different landscapes, that of the true *schilderachtig*, and that of the false *schilderachtig*.⁹⁰ As may well be imagined, de Lairese's description of the true *schilderachtig* landscape is a highly idealized one in which the road is smooth, and attractive little villages in good repair are scattered among the only partially ruined remnants of antiquity. Fallen columns

⁸⁷ Weber, *Lobtopos*. 265, lines 379-385 of the poem as it is reproduced here.

⁸⁸ Schenkeveld, *Literature*. 124-5.

⁸⁹ Weber, *Lobtopos*. 265, lines 384-5.

⁹⁰ Lairese, *Groot*. Vol I, 418-434.

lie alongside the road and are all at the perfect height on which to sit and contemplate the surrounding landscape. It should be noted that the landscape is virtually devoid of people, and that it very strongly resembles landscapes by artists like Poussin and Charles le Brun, artists whom de Lairese specifically praises for their awareness of the “true” *schilderachtig*.⁹¹

The false *schilderachtig* landscape de Lairese describes is the polar opposite of the true, with winding irregular roads, dilapidated villages, and classical ruins that are decayed beyond recognition. It should be noted that in this description, the landscape is teeming and crawling with artists, sketching and capturing their environment, a stark contrast to the empty true *schilderachtig* landscape, perhaps a statement of Lairese’s frustration with popular taste.⁹²

On the whole, Willem van Aelst’s fish still lifes fall comfortably within the concept of the *schilderachtig*. They reveal an interest in the visual appeal inherent in objects that classicists like de Lairese would not regard as suitable subjects for depiction. Moreover, *schilderachtigheid* is not a term for which we possess a firm definition since in some cases it simply seems to refer to anything richly varied, peculiar, distinctive or unusual, adjectives certainly applicable to van Aelst’s subject matter in his fish paintings.⁹³ In addition, van Aelst occasionally included ugly or unseemly elements in other compositions. For instance, in one of the pictures he painted for the Medici (Figure

⁹¹ Lairese, *Groot*. Vol I, 419.

⁹² Lairese, *Groot*. Vol II, 260. A connection should be made here between the crowded nature of de Lairese’s false *schilderachtig* landscape (implying the popularity of the subject matter), and the quotation on still life given at the opening of this section in which he states that he formerly admired the “rubbish” of low still-life subjects. Both elements seem to suggest a greater, largely unspoken, interest in low subjects, against which classicism quite consciously seemed to rebel.

⁹³ The litany of adjectives is drawn from Vries, “Gerard.” 83.

43) a ram's head and draped hide is the central compositional element. This is accentuated by the carcass of a skinned turkey, dangling like an elaborate garland, with heart and liver visible.⁹⁴ Remarkably, van Aelst takes advantage of the reflective qualities of the moist, deep-purple liver of the turkey, depicting in some detail the manner in which it mirrors other elements in the composition. Van Aelst's fish paintings frequently display similar qualities of shine and reflection in unexpected objects, like fish guts or scales (Figure 71). Although objects such as partially gutted fish, as well as slaughtered animals in various states do not precisely correspond to the confines of the *schilderachtig* described above, they do strike a congruent note.

Ultimately, there is a strong connection between the concept of the *schilderachtig* and still lifes of the low and the ugly. This is especially significant because the *schilderachtig* is also related to the paradoxical encomium, which was discussed above. The *schilderachtig*, like the paradoxical encomium, seeks to elevate a low subject through careful description or depiction. Certainly, van Aelst's precise rendering of the reflective qualities of fish scales or even the liver of a turkey accomplishes precisely this feat. Moreover, elements of artistic virtuosity are also significant here as the successful elevation of a low subject acts as a demonstration of artistic skill. It is this interlacing of the *schilderachtig*, the paradoxical encomium and artistic virtuosity that suggests that still lifes of the low are not simply faithful depictions of ordinary subjects, but carefully constructed works with larger concerns.

⁹⁴ George S. Keyes et al., eds., *Masters of Dutch Painting: The Detroit Institute of Art* (London: D. Giles Limited, 2004). 26-7. In her catalog entry on an Abraham van Beyerens still life, which contains an identical gory carcass, Susan Donahue Kuretsky identifies the subject, crediting a butcher with whom she consulted.

The final issue that bears upon still lifes of low or ugly subjects is one of presentation. There is a tendency within this group of images to place the low or ugly element of the painting in direct juxtaposition with a beautiful or elevated object. Indeed, that the juxtaposition of the low and the beautiful was an established technique can be found in Gerard de Lairesse's discussion of the *schilderachtig*. At the close of his description of the true *schilderachtig* landscape he devotes a lengthy passage to the scorn of paintings of low subjects. In the midst of this section he makes the following statement:

A Princess sufficiently shines amongst her ladies in waiting through her bearing and her costly adornments without one having to set her luster off by a comparison with a swineherd.⁹⁵

Thus Gerard de Lairesse directly acknowledges, and indeed disapproves of, the practice of juxtaposition in order to enhance beauty.

Willem van Aelst's fish paintings are especially good examples of this practice (Figure 90). This 1678 painting depicts elaborate silverwork and an elegant red-velvet tablecloth accompanied by a plate of herring, onions and a roll. The result is a particularly acute contrast. The silver and the velvet cloth were all recommended still life subjects, according to Gerard de Lairesse, while the herring, onions and roll were clearly not. The juxtaposition which van Aelst creates in this painting, indeed in all of his fish paintings, functions on a number of levels. In a very basic sense, the slimy fish, along with the onions and roll, offset the beauty of the silver and the cloth, making them more appealing by comparison. As discussed at the beginning of this section, however, van

⁹⁵ Lairesse, *Groot*. Vol I, 428.

Aelst's agenda was not so basic. We have already considered the manipulation of the fish to enhance its visual similarity to the silver and therefore introduce an element of artistic rivalry. Van Aelst creates a simulacrum of a valuable object using a relatively valueless substance. The mirroring, in this case, is also a statement about the artistic skill of the silversmith who made the nautilus cup and his ability to create objects that reflect and imitate the beauty inherent in the natural world, the marvelous as made by man, mimicking the marvelous as made by God.⁹⁶ And yet, this is a painting of both of these objects, so that van Aelst is not only presenting us with the skill of the silversmith, but ultimately the skill of the painter who is able to capture not only the virtuosic product of human labor, but also the virtuosic product of nature, and by extension God. Therefore van Aelst is making a complex, multi-layered statement about his own virtuosity, and in some ways the parallel that can be drawn between his creations and the creations of the ultimate artist of the natural and the marvelous, God.⁹⁷

Van Aelst makes similar parallels in most of his other fish paintings. In addition, he makes related claims in other works such as the 1663 flowerpiece in the Mauritshuis collection (Figure 25). In this painting, the element of the low is not present, as it is in his fish paintings. Nevertheless, van Aelst makes allusions to the larger, cosmological nature of his artistry. In this image the elaborate auricular silver vase is quite directly aligned with the head and metallic body of the dragonfly which hovers nearby. The majesty of

⁹⁶ James V. Mirillo, "The Aesthetics of the Marvelous: The Wondrous Work of Art in a Wondrous World," in *The Age of the Marvelous*, ed. Joy Kenseth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). 61-2.

⁹⁷ Mirillo, "Aesthetics." 62.

God's creation, mirrored in man's artful silver and ultimately captured by the virtuosic hand of Willem van Aelst.⁹⁸

The notion of the low or ordinary subject in still life painting is an integral part of Dutch artistic culture. It is not simply a reflection of the everyday objects that surrounded artists but is rather the result of deliberate selection and presentation. Multiple strands of meaning interconnect in these images, although they cluster primarily around the themes of paradox and artistic virtuosity. Paradox defines these works, for they are at heart paradoxical encomia, elevations of the low. The demonstration of artistic virtuosity is a primary goal of these images, their humble appearances belying their lofty aspirations. The theoretical concepts of *schilderachtigheid*, and *difficultá* are implicit in the recurrent juxtaposition of the low and beautiful. Many of the concerns associated with still lifes of the low or ordinary play an integral role in the fish pieces of Willem van Aelst. His choice and careful presentation of such ostensibly low subject matter has the effect of heightening the artistry in these paintings. The implications of such subject matter ranges from the fundamental display of artistic skill inherent in a paradoxical encomium, to larger intimations related to the notion that artistic skill creates a microcosmic version of the divinely ordained universe. This distinct category of low or unsavory subject matter fits well with van Aelst's artistic agenda. It is a further means for the expression and exploration of his prodigious talent.

The theme of artistic virtuosity within the oeuvre of Willem van Aelst is evident in a number of self-reflexive elements present in his still lifes. The reflected self-portraits he created early in his career mark a deliberate campaign of self promotion that shapes

⁹⁸ Goedde, "Little World." speaks to this notion and the manner in which still life paintings could be viewed as microcosms of the larger world.

his approach to his work. The new calligraphic form that he adopted for his signature signals an awareness of and willingness to exploit the social implications of the elaborate script. His transformation of Paulus van Vianen's elaborate metalwork into a carved stone relief is indicative of a deliberate and heightened statement of artistic rivalry. This is emphasized by van Aelst's signature in precisely the same place as the medalist's own signature on his depiction of the French medal crafted by Jean Warin. Finally, his entirely unique depiction of the low subject of fish in a number of his elegant still lifes becomes a refined statement of his own artistic skill. Willem van Aelst's remarkable artistic ability is evident to even the most casual observer. His meticulous technique, his elegant compositions and his careful choice of subject matter testify eloquently this fact. The themes explored in this chapter express the degree to which van Aelst was aware of, and sought to capitalize on, his own considerable skill.

Conclusion

By viewing Nature, Nature's handmaid Art,
Makes mighty things from small beginnings grow.¹

Just five years after the death of Willem van Aelst in Amsterdam, John Dryden included these lines in his epic poem *Annus Mirabilis*. It was certainly not Dryden's intent to refer to van Aelst, indeed the context is wholly different, yet it would be difficult to conceive of lines that more aptly and concisely described his art. Under the hand of van Aelst a dead pheasant is a marvel of varied and expressive brushwork, a single rose a complex of chalky pink glazes, and a lowly red admiral butterfly, standing on whisper thin legs, becomes an object of inexpressible, delicate beauty. Van Aelst's great power lies in the transformative quality of his art. His still life paintings, after all, like any still life paintings, are portraits of objects. It is the quality of his technique, and the nature of his compositions and choices of objects that make his paintings identifiably his own. It is the intensive study of these choices, and the remarkable paintings that resulted from them, which forms the basis for this dissertation.

And yet in addition to artistic implications, the decisions van Aelst made throughout his career are also indicative of his lofty aspirations. Indeed, as the preceding pages have intimated, van Aelst's drive for artistic success lay behind many of his choices not only in his art but also in his life. Without ambition for greater success, van Aelst would never have made his way out of Delft to France and Italy. His attainment of

¹ John Dryden, *Annus Mirabilis*, London, 1688. stanza 155.

the highly coveted favor of the Medici suggests that, unlike Willem Kalf, who returned directly to the Netherlands from France, van Aelst's intent was for greater achievement and renown. Later decisions, such as his use of the Italian form of his first name in order to remind patrons of his work at the Medici court, continue in a similar vein. Even his deliberate choice of the fine style, which might simply be viewed as a stylistic decision, was clearly the result of his experience in France and his awareness of the great appeal that fine painting held. Individually, each of these choices might be viewed as inconsequential, yet viewed as a whole they assume a greater significance. They suggest an individual who was remarkably deliberate, even calculating, in terms of his approach to both his life and his art. In a very real way, his paintings, with their smooth, flawless surfaces, mirror this deliberate nature.

Van Aelst's awareness of his own virtuosity and his willingness to create paintings that demonstrated it so vividly is one of his most notable qualities. When van Aelst depicts himself, reflected in a *roemer* wreathed by grape vines and drapery, it is not a literal transcription of a *roemer* and its reflections, but a deliberate statement about the centrality of his artistry. Similarly, his depiction of a slimy tangle of fish flesh and entrails in front of an auricular silver standing salt, goes well beyond documentation and stands as an assertion of his own painterly prowess. For van Aelst, such paintings were an opportunity to demonstrate his virtuosity. That patrons appreciated his artistry is undeniable in the face of evidence such as sustained Medici patronage, high prices and fascinating correspondences between van Aelst's paintings and the larger collections in

which they were located. His success in this regard is unquestionable; his paintings are remarkable objects. Whether depicting fish, flowers, birds, silver, fruit or any other subject, his technique and his invention remain high. It is the study and appreciation of these qualities that garnered success for him in the seventeenth-century, and it is these same qualities that reward study even now. Through the careful examination of his painted oeuvre alongside the varied events of his life, we are able to more fully understand the reasons behind the artistic choices that he made. Arnold Houbraken may once have disparagingly asserted that van Aelst's disposition was overly grand, but the study of his art and the events of his life suggest that perhaps he had reason to be.

Appendix: Checklist of Paintings

The following chronological list represents the oeuvre of paintings on which this dissertation is based. It is organized into two groups. The first includes all of the paintings I believe to be by van Aelst and have been able to confirm with some certainty. The second section of the list (Section B) contains paintings with debatable attributions that I have not been able to confirm as the work of van Aelst, but which I feel may be the work of van Aelst. Where the current location of the painting is unknown, I have listed the most recent provenance information as a finding aid.

This list is the result of my personal examinations, as well as research in the photo archives of the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, The Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie in The Hague and the personal archives of Dr. Sam Segal.

Accepted Works

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1. *Flower Still Life with Fruit*
London, The Hallsborough Gallery, 1966
Oil on Panel: 44 x 36 cm
Signed and dated lower center: wvaelst 1643
Fig. 23

 2. *Still Life with Fruit and a Vase with a Rose*
Amsterdam, Kunsthandel P. de Boer, summer 1957
Oil on panel: 57 x 57.5 cm
Signed and dated lower left: wvaelst 1644

 3. *Fruit Piece with a Flute Glass*
Bergamo, Galleria Lorenzelli, 1971
Oil on canvas: 43 x 64 cm
Signed and dated upper left: ...elst 1644

 4. *Peaches, a Plum and Grapes on a Ledge*
Henry H. Weldon Collection
Oil on copper: 17 x 22.7 cm
Signed and dated lower center: wvaelst 1646
Fig. 4

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5. *Fruit Piece with Façon de Venise Glass*
Düsseldorf, Galerie Lingenauber, 1991
Oil on canvas: 22.5 x 33.5 cm
Signed and dated lower center: wvaelst 1646
-
6. *Still Life with a Mouse and a Candle*
Private Collection
Oil on copper: 19.3 x 24.7 cm
Signed and dated lower center: wvaelst 1647
Comments: Exquisite early work on copper, only true *vanitas* image in van Aelst's oeuvre. Remarkably loose and painterly. Thin paint over the copper support is used to enhance the effect of the candle's smoldering wick.
-
7. *Fruit Piece with Peaches and Plums*
Paris, Collection Madame Leegenhoek, 1968
Support unknown: 36.5 x 49.5 cm
Signed and dated lower right: wvaelst 1648
-
8. *Fruit Piece with Grapes, Lemons and Pomegranates*
Vienna, Gallery Friederike Pallamer, 1978
Oil on canvas: 41 x 54 cm
Signed and dated lower center: wvaelst 1648
Comments: What appears to be a later copy of this painting is in the collection of the Musee des Augustins in Toulouse, France, inv. RO 470.
-
9. *Nature Morte de Fruits*
Munich, Xavier Schiedwimmer 1957
Oil on panel: 41 x 32.7 cm
Signed, undated: w.van aelst (c. 1648)
Comments: Appears to be a version of number 10
-

10. *Nature Morte de Fruits*

Toulouse, Musée des Augustins, Inv. RO 471

Oil on Canvas: 44.5 x 34 cm

Unsigned, undated (c. 1648)

Comments: This is one of the few examples of van Aelst's early experiments with including live birds in his compositions, a motif he quickly abandoned. The back of the panel bears the maker's mark of Melchior de Bout (active 1625-58) a panel maker in Antwerp. The mark is an intertwined M and reversed B in a square. His mark appears on three other van Aelst paintings, all dating from his Paris period. See numbers 16, 17 & 19. The painting is appears to be a second version of number 9.

11. *Fruit Still Life with a Snail on a Marble Table with a Dark Cloth*

Delft, Stedelijk Museum Het Prinsenhof

Oil on canvas: 53.5 x 65 cm

Signed and dated middle center: wvaelst 1649

Comments: One of first French period paintings. Composition is reproduced in larger flower and fruit painting of the early 1650's by Jean Michel Picart, now with Richard Green in London. Relationship noted in report on the painting drawn up by Fred Meijer.

Fig. 6

12. *Flower Piece*

UK, Collection Colonel Joseph Weld, Lulworth Manor

Oil on Canvas: 66.5 x 52 cm

Signed and dated lower left: wvaelst 1649

13. *Still Life with a Basket of Peaches and a Blue Velvet Cloth on a Marble Ledge*

New York, Warneford Collection

Oil on canvas: 37.5 x 49.5 cm

Signed and dated lower right: wvaelst 1650

Comments: Seen most recently in the 1999 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum and the National Gallery, London, *Vermeer and the Delft School*.

-
14. *Still Life of Plums, Peaches, Almonds and Grapes on a Draped Ledge*
Otto Naumann, 2007
Oil on Canvas: 30.2 x 46.6 cm
Signed and dated lower left: wvaelst 1650
Fig. 35
-
15. *Fruit Piece with Grapes, Peaches and a Pomegranate*
Sale of the estate of Edmund Huybrechts, Antwerp, May 9, 1902, number 59
Oil on canvas: 98 x 111 cm
Signature unknown, Dated 1650
-
16. *Bouquet of Flowers*
Caen, Musée des Beax Arts
Oil on panel: 42 x 32.6
Signed and dated lower center: wvaelst 1651
Comments: The back of the panel bears the maker's mark of Melchior de Bout (active 1625-58) a panel maker in Antwerp. The mark is an intertwined M and reversed B in a square. His mark appears on three other van Aelst paintings, all dating from his Paris period. See numbers 10, 17 & 19.
Fig: 8
-
17. *Bouquet of Flowers*
Toulouse, Musée des Augustins
Oil on panel: 45 x 33 cm
Signed and dated: wvaelst 1651
Comments: The back of the panel bears the maker's mark of Melchior de Bout (active 1625-58) a panel maker in Antwerp. The mark is an intertwined M and reversed B in a square. His mark appears on three other van Aelst paintings, all dating from his Paris period. See numbers 10, 16 & 19.
-
18. *Flowers in a Gold Mounted Vase*
Collection B.H. Dreesman, Woodcote Park, Epsom, 1961
Oil on panel, 33 x 40 cm
Signed and dated: form unknown, 1651
-

-
19. *Pronk Still Life with a Jewelry Box*
Zamek Vizovice, Vizovice, Czech Republic
Oil on panel: 45.5 x 32 cm
Signed and dated on medallion: wvaelst 1651
Comments: The back of the panel bears the maker's mark of Melchior de Bout (active 1625-58) a panel maker in Antwerp. The mark is an intertwined M and reversed B in a square. His mark appears on three other van Aelst paintings, all dating from his Paris period. See numbers 10, 16 & 17. Medallion is identifiable with early medallion of Louis XIV, created by Jean Warin.
Fig: 9
-
20. *Still Life of Birds*
Florence, Galleria Degli Uffizi, Inv. 1890 n. 1245
Oil on canvas: 50.5 x 67.3 cm
Signed and dated: wvaelst 1652
Comments: First completed game piece.
-
21. *Still Life of Flowers*
Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, Inv. OdA 1911 n. 508
Oil on canvas: 73 x 58 cm
Signed and dated: W.V.aelst 1652
Comments: Pendant to no. 22
Fig: 14
-
22. *Still Life of Fruit and Objects*
Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, Inv. OdA 1911 n. 509
Oil on canvas: 73 x 58 cm
Signed and dated on edge of tablecloth: W.V.aelst 1652
Comments: Pendant to no. 21
Fig. 13
-
23. *Still Life of Game*
Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, inv. 1912 n. 466
Oil on canvas: 124.5 x 99.5 cm
Signed and dated: wvaelst 1652
Comments: Pendant to no. 24
-

-
24. *Still Life of Vegetables, Ram's Head and Game*
Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, inv. 1912 n. 454
Oil on canvas: 125.5 x 99.5 cm
Signed and dated: w.v.aelst 1652
Comments: Pendant to no. 23
Fig. 43
-
25. *Still Life of Fish and Game*
Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina. Poggio Imperiale n. 3533
Oil on canvas: 84 x 102 cm
Signed and dated: W.V.aelst 1653
Comments: This painting apparently had a pendant at one time, now lost.
Fig. 65
-
26. *Still Life with Fish, Lobster, Birds and Mushrooms*
Moscow, Pushkin Museum. Nr. 323
Oil on canvas: 42 x 57 cm
Signed and dated, unknown (c. 1653)
Comments: Content and form of the painting seem strongly related to the Florence period paintings. Signature and date unknown. Note that size may have been reduced.
-
27. *Still Life of Fruit and Precious Objects*
Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina. 1912. n. 469
Oil on canvas: 77 x 102 cm
Signed and dated on tablecloth: WVaelst 1653
Comments: Pendant to no. 28
Fig. 10
-
28. *Still Life of Fruit*
Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, inv. 1912 n. 46
Oil on canvas: 77 x 102 cm
Signed and dated: W.V.aelst 1653
Comments: Pendant to no. 27
Fig. 46
-

-
29. *Hunt Piece*
Berlin, Kaiser Friedrich Museum, cat. 1931, nr. 961
Oil on canvas: 66 x 48 cm
Signed and dated: WVaelst 1653
Comments: Lost in WWII
-
30. *Still Life of Fruit, Objects and Game*
Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, Inv. OdA 1911 n. 561
Oil on canvas: 195.5 x 137 cm
Signed and dated on chair leg: W.V.aelst 1654
Comments: Largest still life in his oeuvre
Fig. 15
-
31. *Still Life of Fruit*
Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, Inv. OdA 1911 n. 498
Oil on canvas: 48 x 64.5 cm
Unsigned undated (c. 1654)
Comments: Although unsigned, the painting is consistent with work from this period.
The painting apparently had a pendant at one time, now lost. (According to 1989
and 2003 collection catalogs)
Fig. 42
-
32. *Three Dead Birds*
Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, Inv. 1890 n. 1209
Oil on canvas: 22.5 x 27.5 cm
Unsigned undated (c. 1654)
Comments: Although unsigned, the painting is consistent with his style and subject
matter
-
33. *Dead Birds and Hunting Equipment Under a Tree*
London, Rafael Valls Ltd. 1999-2004
Oil on Canvas: 61 x 75 cm
Signed and dated lower right: WVaelst f 1654
Comments: One of few outdoor still life paintings.
Fig. 56
-

-
34. *Vase of Flowers with a Watch*
Kassel, Staatliche Kunstsammlung, nr. 905
Oil on canvas: 55 x 46.3 cm
Signed and dated lower center: W.V. aelst 1656
Comments: Primary version of composition that exists in two other paintings. See numbers 35 and 36.
Fig. 83
-
35. *Vase of Flowers with a Watch*
Vienna, Akademie der Bildenden Künste, inv. no. 692
Oil on canvas: 55 x 45 cm
Unsigned, undated (c. 1656)
Comments: Version of Kassel painting, number 34, executed by van Aelst. See also number 36.
Fig. 84
-
36. *Vase of Flowers with a Watch*
Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art, Accession number. 52.9.57
Oil on canvas: 55 x 45 cm
Unsigned, undated (c. 1656)
Comments: Version of Kassel painting, number 34, executed by van Aelst. Also contains variation of dragonfly and mouse. See also number 35.
Fig. 85
-
37. *Breakfast Piece with Silver Pitcher*
Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst, KMS379
Oil on canvas: 58 x 64 cm
Signed and dated lower right: W.V. aelst 1657
Comments: Silver pitcher similar to production of Christiaan van Vianen after his father Adam van Vianen.
Fig. 66
-

38. *Dead Game and Implements of Sport*

London, Hampton Court Palace, cat. nr. 759

Oil on canvas: 105.5 x 90 cm

Signed and dated lower left: W.V.aelst 1657

Comments: Close study of the painting revealed that the green game bag was originally blue, and then painted over with green paint, presumably by van Aelst. The blue pigment appears along some of the bag's edges. Chief conservator Rupert Featherstone confirmed this observation. May have been acquired by Charles II while he was in the Netherlands. A copy of large parts of this painting surfaced in 1900 at Frederik Muller & co. in Amsterdam. Its current location is unknown.

Fig. 53

39. *Still Life with Birds*

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. SK-A-1669

Oil on canvas: 95 x 78.5 cm

Signed and dated lower right: Willem van Aelst alias de. ____ A° 1658

Comments: First use of the calligraphic signature, identical signature to Number 40, includes drawing of a stick figure which has caused some to conclude that this may be in reference to his Bentveughel name. There is no evidence for this.

Fig. 51

40. *Vase of Flowers*

Private Collection, published in Chong

Oil on canvas: 57.8 x 45.7 cm

Signed and dated lower right: Willem van Aelst alias de. ____ A° 1658

Comments: First use of the calligraphic signature, identical signature to Number 39, includes drawing of a stick figure which has caused some to conclude that this may be in reference to his Bentvueghel name. There is no evidence for this.

Fig. 79

41. *Still Life of Grapes, a Roemer, a Silver Ewer and a Plate*

Johnny van Haften, 2002 catalog of Dutch and Flemish Old Master Paintings

Oil on canvas: 70.1 x 45.4 cm

Signed and dated lower left: WVaelst 1659

Comments: Reflected self portrait in roemer, as in number 42. First use of calligraphic signature, hereafter standard form.

Fig. 96

-
42. *Fruits and a Wineglass*
Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunst, nr. 729
Oil on canvas: 81.2 x 66 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1659
Comments: First use of Italian version of Willem in the signature. Signature is calligraphic. Reflected self-portrait in the roemer as in number 42.
Fig. 32
-
43. *Still Life with Luxury Vessels and Fruits*
Berlin, Staatliches Museen zu Berlin, Gemaldegalerie, 975
Oil on canvas: 84 x 70 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1659
Comments: Bekerschroef is in the collection of the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague and was originally executed by Andries Grill in 1642
Fig. 68
-
44. *Still Life with Roses, Peaches and Glassware*
Moscow, Pushkin Museum, inv. 1842
Oil on canvas: 67 x 52 cm
Signed and dated lower center on table leg: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1659
-
45. *Fruit Still Life*
Leipzig, Museum der Bildenden Künste, inv. 1574
Oil on canvas: 70 x 53.6 cm
Signed lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst (no apparent date) c. 1659
-
46. *Hunt Piece with Two Partridges*
Amsterdam, Kunsthandel P. de Boer, 1997
Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 165.. (final digit abraded)
Oil on canvas: 58 x 46 cm
Comments: This painting has been dated to 1657 in the past, however the abrasion of the final digit makes such a date uncertain. Because of the style, the similar subject matter to number 47 and the form the signature takes, I believe this painting is more likely to bear the date 1659.
-

-
47. *Still Life of Dead Birds and Hunting Equipment*
Berlin, Staatliches Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kat. Nr. KFMV 236
Oil on canvas: 86.5 x 68 cm
Signed and dated: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1660
-
48. *Vase with Flowers*
Cape Town, Michaelis Collection, inv. nr. 14/1
Oil on canvas: 83.8 x 66.7 cm
Signed and dated lower middle: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1660
Comments: Date of 1659 is beginning to show through from beneath 1660.
Fig. 86
-
49. *Partridges and Hunting Equipment*
München, Alte Pinakothek, cat. 1957 no. 839
Oil on canvas: 76.5 x 57.5 cm
Signed and dated, unknown (c. 1660)
-
50. *Still Life with Dead Game*
Washington, National Gallery of Art, 1982.36.1
Oil on canvas: 84.7 x 67.3 cm
Signed and dated lower right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1661
Comments: Features frieze of Diana and Actaeon
Fig. 50
-
51. *Still Life with Nautilus Cup*
Schwerin, Staatliches Museum, Inv. nr. G424
Oil on canvas: 58.5 x 52 cm
Signed and dated upper right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1661 (traces)
Fig. 1
-
52. *Herring and Tazza on a Table*
Private Collection
Oil on panel: 57 x 46 cm
Signed and dated, unknown (c. 1661)
Comments: Painting is reproduced in Alan Chong and Walter Kloek, *Still-Life Paintings From the Netherlands*. Zwolle: Waanders, 1999. 247.
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-
53. *Fruit Piece with Peaches, Walnut, Grapes and a Snail*
Amsterdam, F. Muller, March 24-27, 1942
Oil on canvas: 65 x 54 cm
Signed and dated upper right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1662
-
54. *Flower Still Life with a Watch*
San Francisco, Legion of Honor Museum, No. 51.21
Oil on canvas: 66 x 53 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1663
Fig. 21
-
55. *Flower Still Life with a Watch*
The Hague, Mauritshuis, Inv. 2
Oil on canvas: 62.5 x 49 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1663
Fig. 25
-
56. *A Vase of Flowers*
Oxford, Ashmolean Museum
Oil on Canvas: 67 x 55 cm
Signed and dated lower right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1663
-
57. *Flower Still Life with a Snail*
Zurich, David Koetser, 2006
Oil on canvas: 48 x 36 cm
Signed and dated: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1663
-
58. *Hunt Piece with Herons and Other Large Birds*
Vienna, Liechtenstein Collection, no. 813
Oil on canvas: 117 x 93 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst f. 1663
Comments: Was in the collection of Abel-François Poisson de Vandières, Marquis de Marigny et de Menars. Item 0860 from Archival Document F-238 (Marigny et Menars) in the Getty Provenance Index Databases.
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59. *Still Life with Hare*
Sarasota, Ringling Museum of Art
Oil on canvas: 136.8 x 106.4 cm
Signed lower left, undated: Guillaume van Aelst, (c. 1663)
-
60. *Glass with Branches Bearing Fruit*
Madrid, Thyssen-Bornemisza, 1968.1
Oil on canvas: 67.3 x 52.1 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Only traces remain [Ae]lst 1664
-
61. *Dead Birds and Hunting Gear*
Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, NM 301
Oil on canvas: 68 x 55 cm
Signed and dated: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1664
Fig. 76
-
62. *Hunt Piece with Partridge and Leather Bag*
Munich, Norbert Pokutta, 1987
Oil on canvas: 67.5 x 51 cm
Unsigned, undated (c. 1665)
-
63. *Hunting Still Life*
Houston, Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, BF.2002.3
Oil on canvas: 65.5 x 52.5 cm
Unsigned, undated (c. 1665)
Comments: Although unsigned, painting is clearly by van Aelst. Features the frieze of Diana and Actaeon found in number 50, National Gallery of Art.
Fig. 80
-
64. *Fruit Piece with Grapes, a Peach and a Dragonfly*
Zurich, David Koetser, 2005
Oil on Canvas: 33.2 x 27.8 cm
Signed and dated: Form unknown, 1665
-
65. *Still Life with Fruit*
Schwerin, Staatliches Museum, Inv. Nr. G 453
Oil on canvas: 63.2 x 57.2 cm
Unsigned and undated (c. 1665)
-

-
66. *Flowers In a Vase on a Marble Table*
London, Richard Green, 1996-1997
Oil on canvas: 79.3 x 66 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1666
-
67. *Fruit Still Life with Peaches, Grapes and a Tazza*
Collection L. Salavin, donated to Foundation de France
Oil on canvas: 48.5 x 39.5 cm
Signed and dated upper right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1666
Comments: Information on ownership of painting derived from files of Dr. Sam Segal
-
68. *Still Life with Fruits*
Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. 330
Oil on canvas: 56 x 44 cm
Signed and dated upper left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1667
Fig. 44
-
69. *Hunt Piece with Gun*
Brussels, Koninklijk Museum, cat. 1984, nr. 3165
Oil on canvas: 80.5 x 76 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Form unknown, 1667
Fig. 17
-
70. *Still Life of Fruit*
Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, A528
Oil on canvas: 47 x 39 cm
Unsigned, undated (c. 1667)
-
71. *Still Life with Hunting Equipment*
Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle, inv. 350
Oil on canvas: 68 x 54 cm
Signed and dated lower center: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1668
Fig. 88
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72. *Hunt Still Life*
Delft, Stedelijk Museum Het Prinsenhof, inv. nr. PDS 1
Oil on canvas: 65.5 x 53 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1668
Comments: A contemporary copy of this composition with a green hunting bag was with Rafael Valls in 2005.
Fig. 87
-
73. *Fruit Piece with Peaches and Grapes*
Paris, Haboldt & Co. 1991
Oil on canvas: 74.5 x 56 cm
Signed and dated lower left Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1670
Fig. 34
-
74. *Still Life of Grapes and Peaches*
Paris, Louvre, Inv. nr. RF666
Oil on canvas: 72 x 66 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1670
-
75. *Fruit Piece with Elaborate Glassware*
Vienna, Akademie der Bildende Kunst, Lost WWII
Oil on canvas: 56 x 47 cm
Signed lower left, undated: Guill^{mo} van Aelst. (c. 1670)
Comments: Date is relative to number 74
-
76. *A Chameleon with a Dragonfly on a Thistle in a Landscape*
London, Rafael Valls, 2002
Oil on canvas: 46.2 x 34.2 cm
Signed and dated upper right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1670
Fig. 60
-
77. *Forest Floor Still Life with Chameleon and Roses*
Vienna, Dorotheum, October 7, 1998, nr. 290
Oil on panel: 43 x 56 cm (oval)
Signed and dated, unknown (c. 1670)
Comments: Only known oval composition. Dated in relation to number 76.
Fig. 61
-

78. *Hunt Still Life with Falcon Hood*

The Hague, Mauritshuis, cat. 1935 no. 3

Oil on canvas: 58.5 x 47.8 cm

Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1671

Fig. 19

79. *Hunt Still Life with Falcon Hood*

Schwerin, Staatliche Museum, inv. nr. 2215

Oil on canvas: 57.5 x 45.7 cm

Signed and dated lower right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1671

Fig. 52

80. *Still Life with Thistle*

Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle, inv. 351

Oil on canvas: 75 x 56.8 cm

Signed and dated upper left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1671

Comments: This unusual painting is a virtual portrait of the large thistle plant and bears much in common with the work of Otto Marseus van Schrieck.

Fig. 59

81. *Forest Floor Still Life with Hunt and Chameleon*

Berlin (Lepke) Sale December 3-5, 1907, nr. 247

Oil on canvas: 80 x 62 cm

Signed and dated upper left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1671

Comments: Although the whereabouts of this painting are unknown, it appears consistent with his style and subject matter, particularly in light of number 80.

Fig. 58

82. *Forest Floor Still Life with Game*

Schwerin, Staatliches Museum, Inv. Nr. G386

Oil on canvas: 73 x 58.5 cm

Signed lower right, undated: Guill^{mo} van Aelst (c. 1671)

Comments: The authenticity of this painting has been doubted by Fred Meijer who in 1992 suggested it might be by Isaac Denies

Fig. 57

-
83. *Still Life with Glassware, Bread and Onions on a Dark Cloth*
Vienna, Akademie der Bildende Kunst, inv. nr. 733
Oil on canvas: 49 x 40 cm
Signed and dated upper right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1671
-
84. *Breakfast Piece with Nautilus Cup*
Schwerin, Staatliche Museum, inv. nr. G 52
Oil on canvas: 63.5 x 52 cm
Signed and dated upper left Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1672
Fig. 18
-
85. *Dead game with Cavalier Coat*
Leeds, City Art Gallery and Temple Newsam, Cat. 1954 No. 16/31
Oil on canvas: 95 x 76 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1673
-
86. *Songbirds with Net and Falcon Hoods*
Herdringen, Fürstenberg collection, inv. nr. 145
Oil on canvas: 32.5 x 27 cm
Signed and dated, unknown (c. 1673)
Comments: Consistent with number 88 for date of c. 1673.
-
87. *Songbirds Suspended on a Branch*
NY Christies, January 18, 1983 nr. 152
Oil on canvas: 31.7 x 26.4 cm
Signed and dated, unknown (c. 1673)
Comments: Consistent with number 88 for date of c. 1673.
-
88. *Songbirds with Hunting Equipment*
Amsterdam, Sale (Brandt), May 22, 1962 nr. 1
Oil on canvas: 37.5 x 31.5
Signed and dated lower right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1673
-
89. *Still Life with Dead Birds and a Game Bag*
Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 85.PA.236
Oil on canvas: 29.7 x 24.4 cm
Signed and dated upper right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1674
-

-
90. *Fruit Still Life with a Mouse*
Private Collection, sold 1993 at TEFAF by Charles Roelofsz.
Oil on canvas: 29.7 x 24.4 cm
Signed and dated upper center: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1674
Fig. 49
-
91. *Still Life with Fruit*
Hampton Court Palace, Royal Collection
Oil on canvas: 64.1 x 49.5 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1674
Comments: In the 1982 catalog of the Dutch Pictures in the Royal Collection compiled by Christopher White, no signature or date is noted. Upon study of the picture I discovered the signature and date in the lower left corner.
-
92. *Hunt Piece with Partridge*
London, Christie's July 8, 1994 nr, 74
Oil on canvas: 47 x 40.7 cm
Signed and dated upper right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1674
-
93. *Breakfast Piece with Oysters*
London, Richard Green, 2006
Oil on canvas: 40.5 x 30 cm
Signed and dated upper left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1675
-
94. *Flower Still Life with a Snail*
Solingen, Gallery Mullenmeister, 1985
Oil on canvas: 38.5 x 31 cm
Signed and dated upper right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1675
-
95. *Group of Flowers*
Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, inv. 300
Oil on canvas: 31.1 x 25.4 cm
Signed and dated lower right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1675
Fig. 29
-

-
96. *Flowers with a Butterfly on a Marble Ledge*
London, Christie's July 9, 1999, nr. 27
Oil on canvas: 31.7 x 25.4 cm
Signed and dated lower center: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1676
Fig. 31
-
97. *Two Dead Chickens*
Schwerin, Staatliche Museum, Inv. nr. G 405
Oil on canvas: 100.5 x 82.5 cm
Signed and dated: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1676
Fig. 78
-
98. *Still Life with Dead Rooster and Partridge*
Bückeburg, Fürst von Schaumburg-Lippe Collection
Oil on canvas: 98 x 77 cm
Signed and dated, unknown (c. 1676)
Comments: Unknown whether signed and dated, but painting looks appropriate for this period. Date of c. 1676 is in relation to number 97.
-
99. *Still Life with Dead Rooster*
Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst, inv. KMS1060
Oil on canvas: 99 x 79 cm
Signed and dated unknown (c. 1676)
Comments: Date of 1676 is given in relation to number 97.
-
100. *Hunting Still Life with Dead Partridge*
Private Collection, formerly Emil G. Bührle
Oil on canvas 58 x 56 cm
Signed and dated upper left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1676
-
101. *Hunt Still Life with Whistle*
Schwerin, Staatliches Museum, Inv. Nr. G69
Oil on canvas: 77.2 x 58.5 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1677
-

102. *Still Life of Flowers*

Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, A435

Oil on canvas: 32 x 26 cm

Signed and dated lower right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1677

Comments: Related to number 103.

Fig. 28

103. *A Pink Rose and a Red and White Pink, a Marigold and Other Flowers with Butterflies on a Marble Ledge*

Zurich, David Koetser, 1992-1995

Oil on canvas: 32 x 26 cm

Signed and dated: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1677

Comments: Related to number 102.

Fig. 30

104. *Fruit Piece with Roemer*

Private Collection since 1971

Oil on canvas: 43 x 38.5 cm

Signed and dated: Form unknown, 1677

105. *Still Life with Fruit, Mouse and Butterflies*

Kassel, Gemaldegalerie, nr. 447

Oil on canvas: 76.7 x 58.3 cm

Signed and dated lower right under table ledge: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1677

Comments: Related to number 106.

Fig. 89

106. *Still Life with a Basket of Grapes, a Silver Dish and Chestnuts on a Stone Ledge with a Red Velvet Cloth*

Private Collection

Oil on canvas: 74 x 56 cm

Signed upper right, undated: Guill^{mo} van Aelst (c. 1677)

Comments: Related to number 105. As this painting is signed but undated, it is my suspicion that this painting is a second version, executed by van Aelst, of the original composition in Kassel.

Fig. 47

107. *Peaches, Chestnuts and Grapes in an Overturned Basket Resting on a Partially Draped Marble Ledge*

London, Richard Green, 2006

Oil on canvas: 58.1 x 46.4

Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1677

Comments: This painting is a possible pendant to number 108.

108. *Peonies, Carnations, Thistles Poppies and a Marigold in a Glass Vase on a Partially Draped Ledge*

London, Richard Green, 2006

Oil on canvas: 58.1 x 46.4 cm

Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1677

Comments: This painting is a possible pendant to number 107.

109. *Still Life with Flowers and a Pocketwatch*

Schwerin, Staatliches Museum, Inv. nr. G 451

Oil on canvas: 73 x 57.3 cm

Signed and dated lower center: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1678

Fig. 24

110. *Pronk Still Life with Orpheus Zoutvat, Roemer and Other Glassware, Bread, Fish, Onions and a Hazelnut on a Dark Cloth*

New York, Sotheby's, May 28, 1999 nr. 41

Oil on canvas: 51.5 x 45 cm

Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1678

Fig. 71

111. *Still Life with Fish, Bread, Onions and Olives with a Nautilus Cup on a Red Silk Cloth on a Stone Table*

Vienna, Galerie Sanct Lucas, 1998

Oil on canvas: 67.7 x 54.6 cm

Signed and dated upper right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1678

Fig. 90

112. *Seafood Onion and Glassware*

Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Gal. Nr. 1331

Oil on canvas: 56 x 45 cm

Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1679

113. *Still Life with a Roemer, Fish, Bread, Walnut, Onions and Cherries on a Dark Cloth*
Basel, Offentliche Kunstsammlung, acc. no. 3
Oil on canvas: 57 x 46 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1679

114. *Still Life with Crab and Herring, Onion, Bread and Glassware on a Dark Cloth*
Lucerne, Steinmeyer, 1924
Oil on canvas: dimensions unknown
Signed upper right, undated: Guill^{mo} van Aelst (c. 1679)
Comments: Date established because of relation to number 113.

115. *Fruit Still Life*
Private Collection, Rotterdam
Oil on canvas: dimensions unknown
Signed and dated upper left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1679
Comments: File and photo studied in files of Dr. Sam Segal

116. *Hunt Still Life*
Hamburg, Kunsthalle, nr. 341
Oil on canvas: 57 x 45.6 cm
Signed and dated lower right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1679

117. *Still Life*
Glasgow, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museums, nr. 307
Oil on canvas: 50.2 x 42.5 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1680

118. *Still Life with Orpheus Zoutvat, Fish, Onions, Bread, Chestnuts and Oysters*
The Hague, Gallery J. Hoogsteder, 1983
Oil on canvas: 57 x 46 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Some remains of signature (c. 1680)
Comments: Notes in RKD file suggest that parts of the painting has been touched up
or added to. Date of c. 1680 is due to dating of number 117.
Fig. 91

119. *Still Life with Two Dead Roosters*

London, Christie's, December 10, 2003, nr. 290

Oil on canvas: 97 x 77 cm

Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1681

120. *Still Life with Fruit*

St. Petersburg, The Hermitage, inv. nr. 9677

Oil on canvas: 58 x 47 cm

Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1681

Fig. 45

121. *Fruit Still Life with a Mouse, a Snail and a Wine Glass on a Marble Table with a Black Cloth*

London, Christie's, April 24, 1998, nr. 58

Oil on canvas: 49 x 41 cm

Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1682

122. *Hunt Piece with Hunting Horn, Partridge and Falcon Hoods*

Paris, Galerie St. Honore, 1987

Oil on canvas: 55 x 45 cm

Signed and dated lower center: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1682

123. *Still Life with Carnations*

Brighton, Brighton and Hove Museums, 000108

Oil on canvas: 49.5 x 42 cm

Signed and dated lower right: ...van Aelst, 1682

124. *Flower Piece*

Zürich, David Koetser, 1991

Oil on canvas: 42 x 33.5 cm

Signed and dated upper right: Guill^{mo} van Aelst 1682

Section B

125. *Studies of Roses*

Lord Jersey Collection, number 212

Oil on unknown support, dimensions unknown

Signed and dated, unknown

Comments: One of two studies of flowers found in photo archives at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. See number 126. Very little information and poor reproductions makes attribution difficult.

126. *Studies of Roses*

Lord Jersey Collection, number 278

Oil on unknown support, dimensions unknown

Signed and dated, unknown

Comments: One of two studies of flowers found in photo archives at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. See number 125. Very little information and poor reproductions makes attribution difficult.

127. *Fruit Still Life with Grapes and Figs*

Paris, Michael Ségoura

Oil on unknown support: 28 x 38.5 cm

Signed and dated lower center: wvaelst 1647

Comments: The compositional irregularities with this painting suggest either van Aelst's inexperience, or a later copy. Information on this painting was found in the files of Sam Segal

128. *Breakfast Piece*

Poznan, National Museum in Poznan, inv. Mo 200

Oil on unknown support: 52.5 x 40 cm

Signed and dated, location unknown: W v. Aelst 1650

Comments: Poor reproductions prevent confirmation of the attribution.

129. *Still Life with Zoutvat, Oysters, Bread and Glasses on a Marble Table with a Blue Cloth*

Amsterdam, Sotheby's November 14, 1990, nr. 42

Oil on panel: 46 x 33.5 cm

Signed and dated lower left: wvaelst 165..

Comments: The odd subject matter of this painting is coupled with certain details of execution that suggest van Aelst's hand. Without a better reproduction, confirmation is not possible.

-
130. *Still Life with Peaches, Plums, a Branch of Cherries and a Bird*
Berlin, Dr. Benedict & co. c. 1928, current location unknown
Oil on panel: dimensions unknown
Signed and dated lower right: wvaelst 1650
-
131. *Peaches, Figs and Blackberries with a Parrot on a Draped Marble Table*
London, Christies, November 7, 1980, no. 36
Oil on panel: 40 x 31.7 cm
Signed and dated: Location unknown, 1651
-
132. *Fruit Piece with a Bird in Flight*
London, Christie's, June 17, 1969, no. 92
Oil on panel: 45.7 x 31.8
Signed and dated, unknown (c. 1651)
-
133. *Pronk Still Life with Nautilus Cup, Fruits and a Watch on a Dark Cloth In Front of a Drapery*
Dessau, Schloß Dessau Inv. no. 594 (Amalienstift)
Oil on canvas: 71 x 85 cm
Signed and dated, unknown (c. 1654)
-
134. *Flower Still Life*
Dusseldorf, Lingenauber, 1992-1995
Oil on canvas: 64.5 x 51.5 cm
Signed and dated: Form unknown, 1659
Comments: Doubt about this attribution exists. Without a high quality reproduction or, preferably the painting itself, it is impossible to confirm or deny the attribution.
-
135. *Still Life with Roemer, Bread, Cherries Fish and Onions*
Montreal, Hornstein collection, was Maastricht, Noortman & Brod, 1984
Oil on canvas: 43.5 x 33 cm
Signed and dated lower left: Guill^{mo} van Aelst, 166.. (likely 1661)
-
136. *Still Life with Glassware, Lemon and Herring*
London, Sotheby's July 7, 1976, no. 26
Oil on canvas: 43 x 34.5 cm
Signed, undated: Form unknown (c. 1661)
-

-
137. *Flowers in an Ornamental Vase on a Marble Plinth*
Munich, Xavier Schiedwimmer, 2005
Oil on canvas: 43 x 32.2 cm
Signed and dated, unknown (c. 1665)
-
138. *Hunt Piece*
Amsterdam, Mak van Waay, January 24, 1967, nr. 133
Oil on canvas: 49.5 x 40 cm
Signed lower right, undated: Guill^{mo} van Ael.. (c. 1668)
Comments: Possibly cut down on the right, causing the loss of the date. Form of signature does not appear correct.
-
139. *Hunt Piece*
Paris, Gallery Guy Stein, May 15-June 3, 1939, no. 3
Oil on canvas: 91 x 68 cm
Signed and dated, unknown (c. 1668)
-
140. *Fruit Piece with Peaches and Grapes*
The Hague, Kunsthandel Cramer 1976
Oil on canvas: 92.5 x 72 cm
Signed, undated: Guillmo van Aelst (c. 1670)
-
141. *Still Life with Peaches, Grapes and Walnuts*
Berlin, Lepke, May 24, 1927 no. 151
Oil on canvas: 75 x 58 cm
Signed and dated, unknown (c. 1670)
Comments: Date is in relation to number 72, however poor reproduction and little information does not allow confirmation of attribution.
-
142. *Hunt Still Life*
Paris, Christie's June 22, 2005, nr. 43
Oil on canvas: 49.6 x 41.5 cm
Signed and dated: Form unknown, 1675
-
143. *Flower Still Life*
The Hague, Kunsthandel Nijstad 1961
Oil on canvas: 57.4 x 46.7 cm
Signed and dated lower right: form unknown, 1676
-

144. *Fruit Still Life*

Munich, Sale Ruef, June 14-16, 1972

Oil on canvas: 37 x 30 cm

Signed and dated lower center: Guillmo van Aelst 1683

Comments: This painting appears to be one of three versions of the same composition, numbers 145 and 146.

145. *Fruit Still Life*

Amsterdam, Dealer J. Schlichte Bergen, 1987

Oil on canvas: 33 x 30.5 cm

Signed and dated, unknown (c. 1683)

Comments: This painting appears to be one of three versions of the same composition, numbers 144 and 146.

146. *Fruit Still Life*

Schwerin, Staatliches Museum, Inv. Nr. G450

Oil on canvas: 40.5 x 31 cm

Signed on reverse: Guillmo van Aelst (c. 1683)

Comments: This painting appears to be one of three versions of the same composition, numbers 144 and 145.

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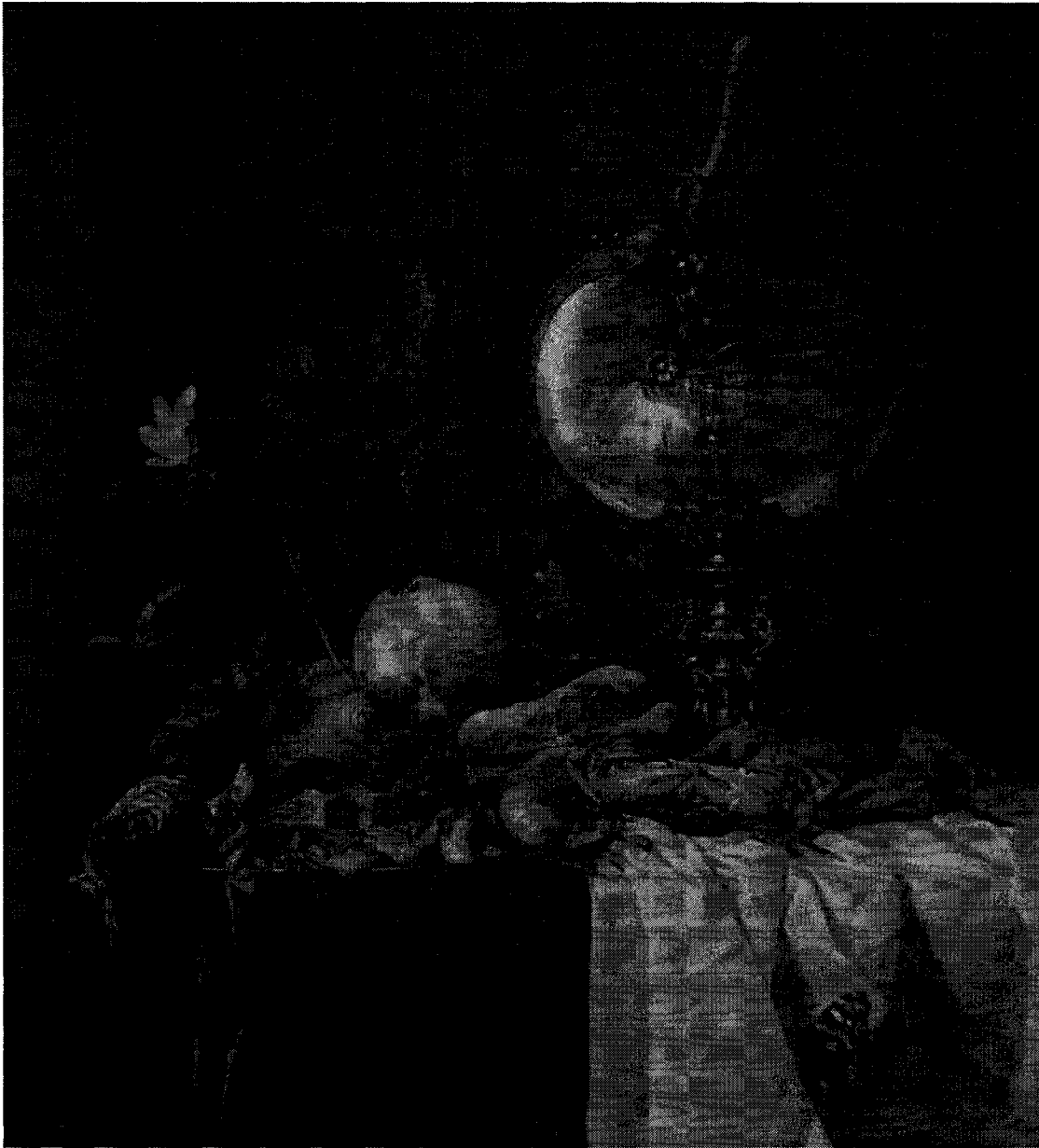


Figure 1: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life with Nautilus Cup*, 1661 Staatliches Museum, Schwerin (58.5 x 52 cm)

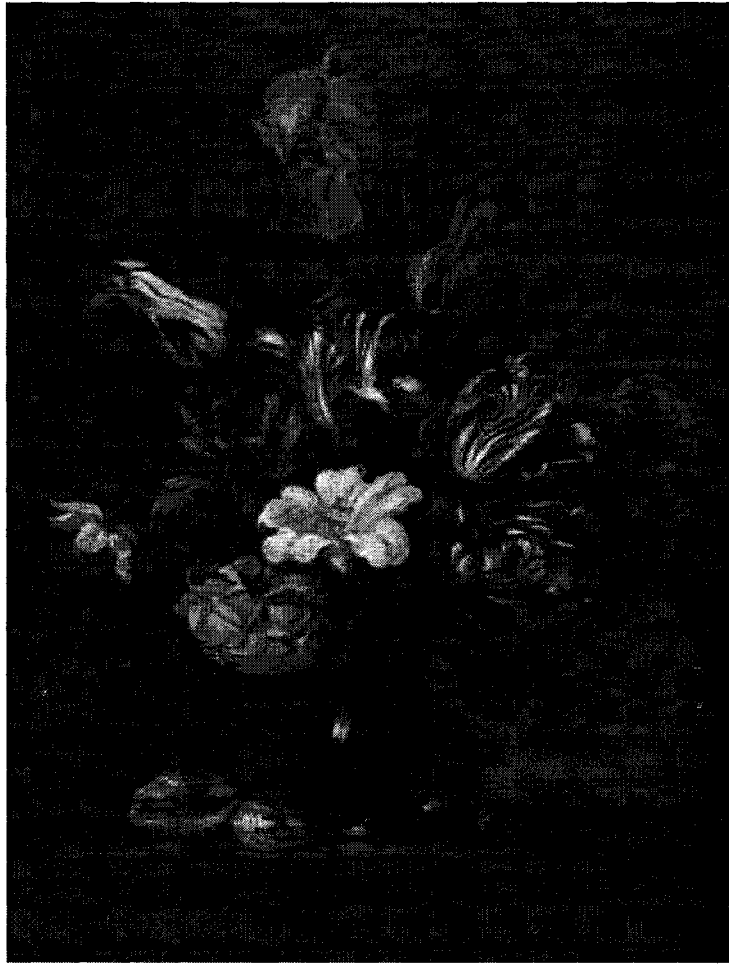


Fig 2: Evert van Aelst, *Flower Still Life with Shells and a Snail*, Sotheby's 1994-05-10, nr. 45



Fig 3: Balthasar van der Ast, *Flower Still Life*, ca. 1630, Private Collection, London

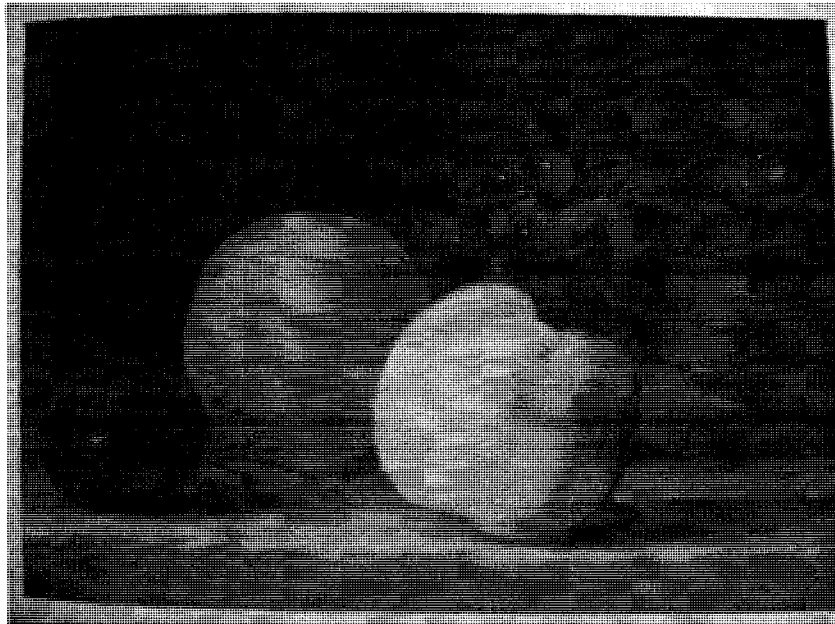


Fig 4: Willem van Aelst, *Peaches, a Plum and Grapes on a Ledge*, 1646, Henry H. Weldon Collection (17 x 22.7 cm)



Fig 5: Paul Liegois, *Peaches, Grapes and Plums on a Stone Ledge*, Private Collection (published in Salvi, 2000, p. 82)



Fig 6: Willem van Aelst, *Fruit Still Life with a Snail on a Marble Table with a Dark Cloth*, 1649, Museum het Prinsenhof, Delft (53.5 x 65 cm)



Fig. 7: Jean Michel Picart, *Bouquet of Flowers in a Lapis Vase*, 1653, Staatlich Kunsthalle Karlsruhe



Fig 8: Willem van Aelst, *Bouquet of Flowers*, 1651, Musee des Beaux Arts, Caen
(42 x 32.6 cm)

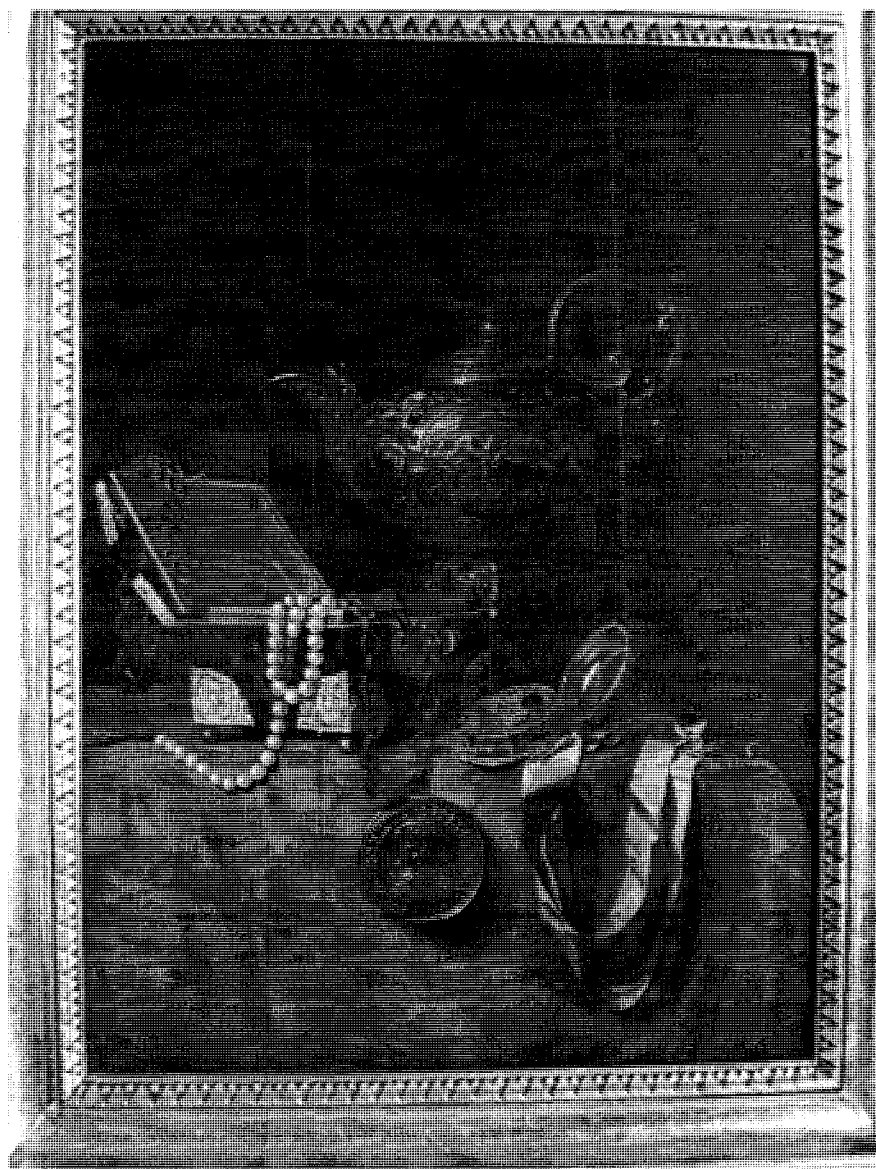


Fig 9: Willem van Aelst, *Pronk Still Life with a Jewelry Box*, 1651, Schloss Vizovice, Vizovice (45.5 x 32 cm)



Fig 10: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life of Fruit and Precious Objects*, 1653, Palazzo Pitti, Florence (77 x 102 cm)



Figure 11: Jean Warin: *Louis XIV and Anne of Austria*, 1643 The British Museum, London

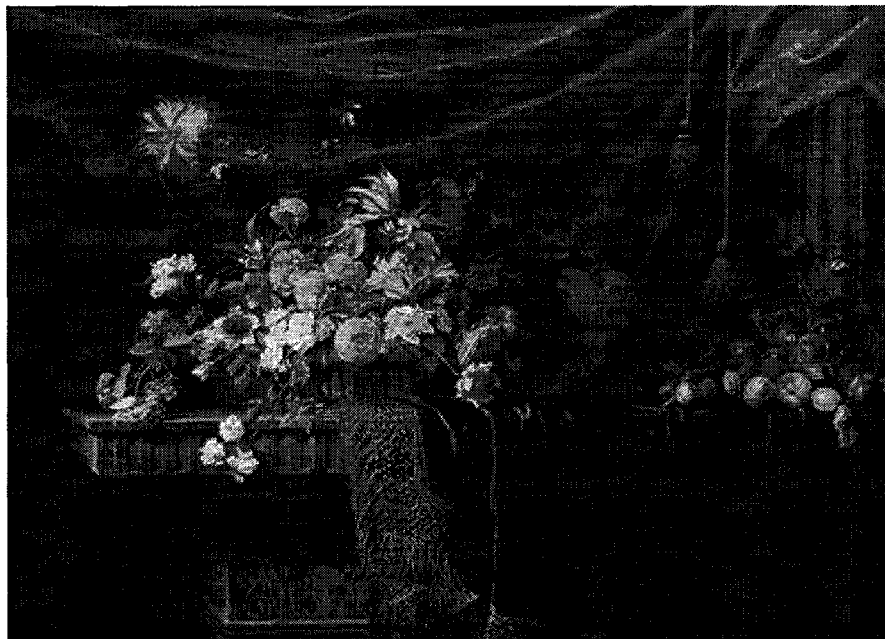


Fig 12: Jean-Michel Picart, *Flowers in a Basket with Fruit on a Draped Table*, c. early 1650's, With Richard Green, London.



Fig. 13: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life of Fruit and Objects*, 1652, Palazzo Pitti, Florence
(73 x 58 cm)



Figure 14: Willem van Aelst, *Still life of Flowers*, 1652, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.
(73 x 58 cm)



Figure 15: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life of Fruit, Objects and Game*, 1654, Palazzo Pitti, Florence (195.5 x 137 cm)



Figure 16: *Lion's head Goblet (one of a pair) made of a nautilus shell mounted on gilt silver with foot and eagle's claws resting on a gilt bronze shell, Flemish Manufacture, second half of the 16th century. Museo degli Argenti, Florence*

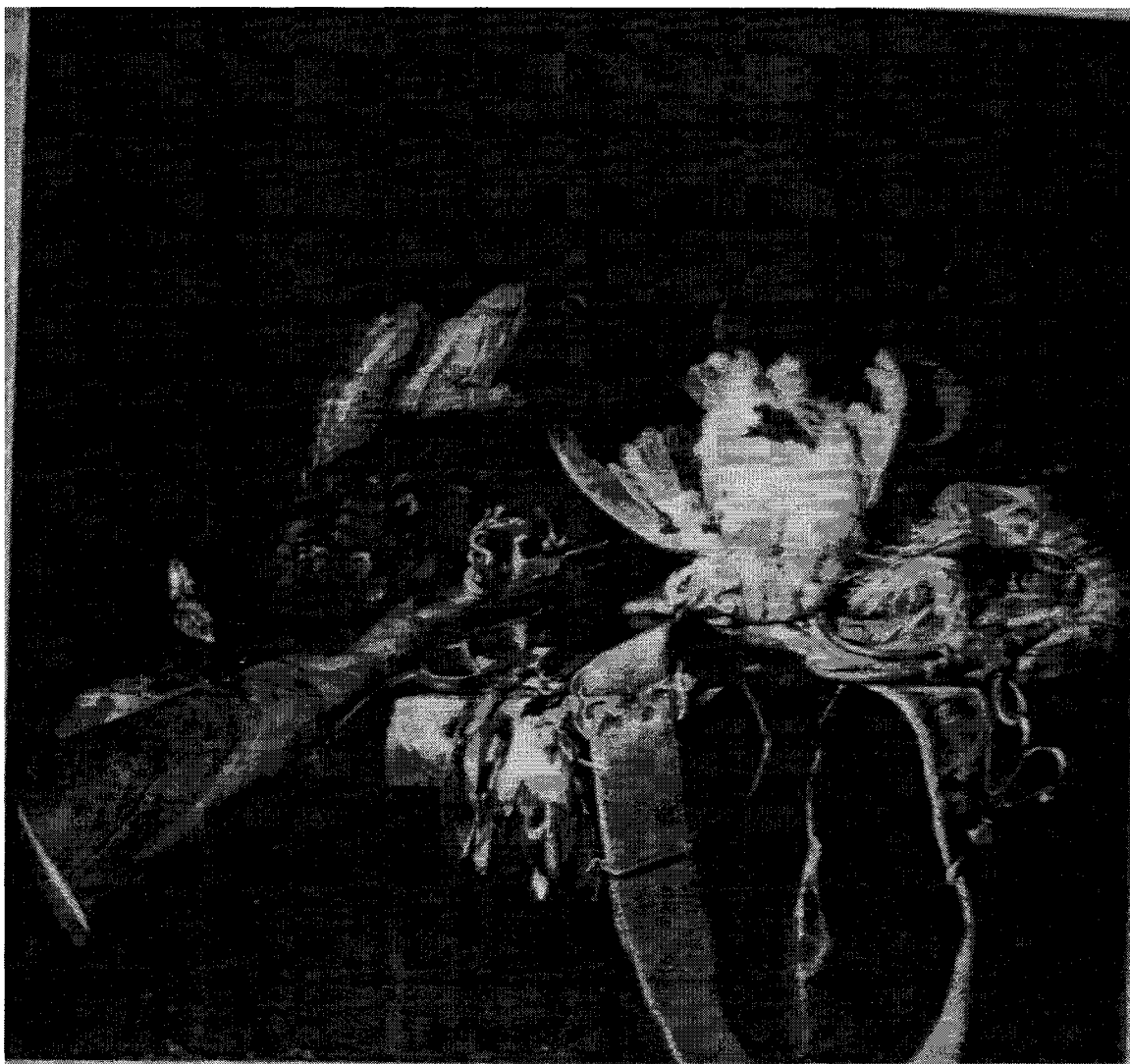


Figure 17: Willem van Aelst, *Hunt Piece with Gun*, 1667, Koninklijk Museum voor Schoene Kunst, Brussels (80.5 x 76 cm)

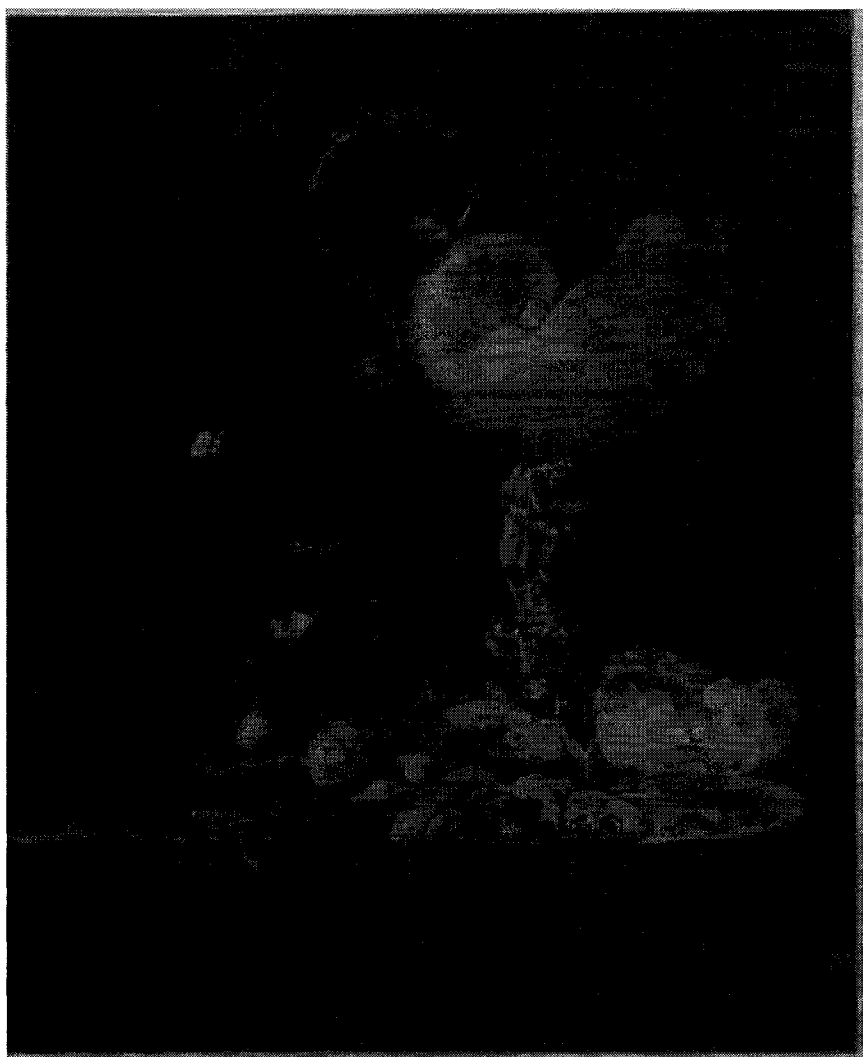


Fig. 18: Willem van Aelst, *Breakfast Piece with Nautilus Cup*, 1672 Staatliche Museum Schwerin (63.5 x 52 cm)

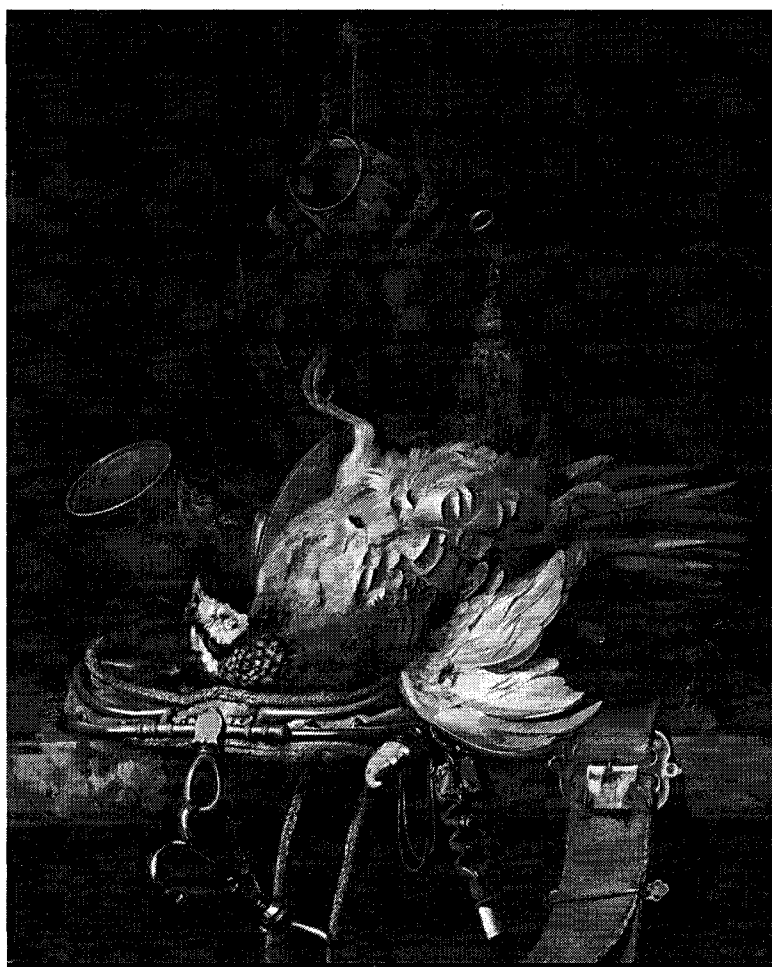


Figure 19: Willem van Aelst, *Hunt Still Life with Falcon Hood*, 1671, Mauritshuis, The Hague (58.5 x 47.8 cm)

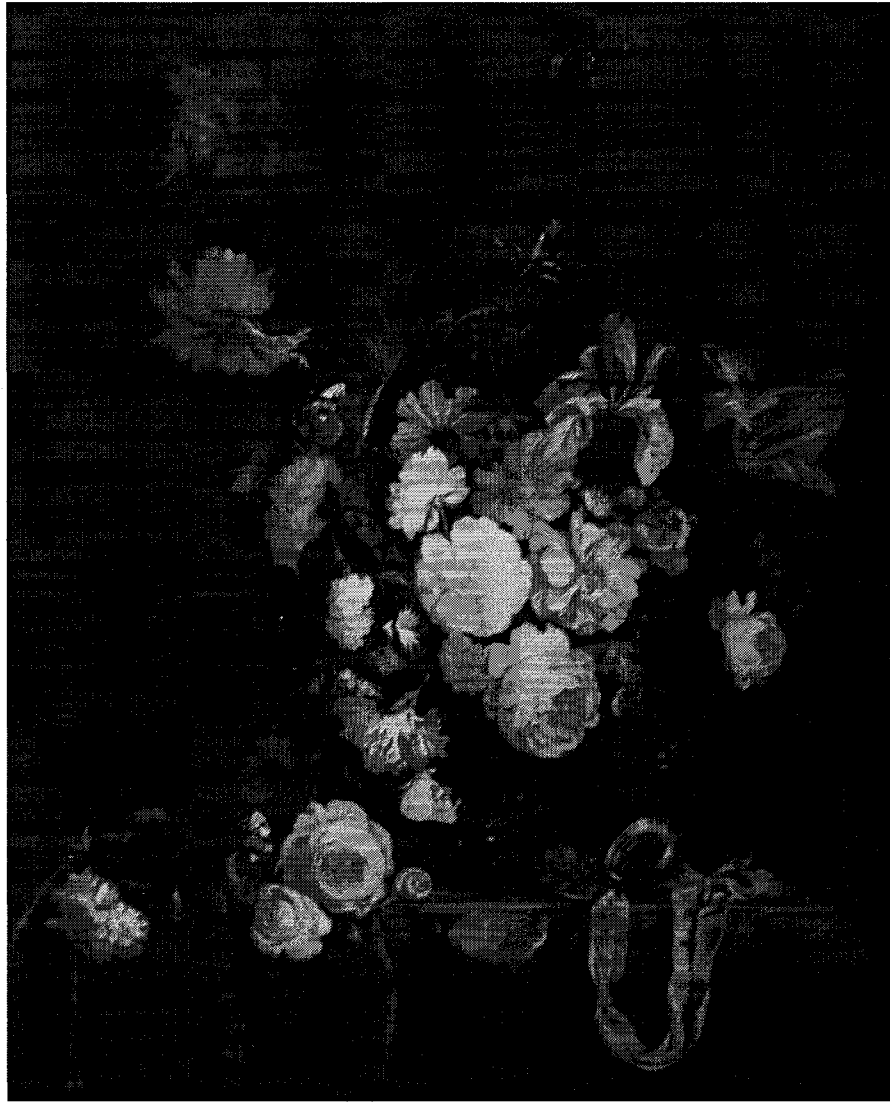


Figure 20: Ernst Stuken, *Vase with Flowers and Timepiece on a Marble Table*, Private Collection

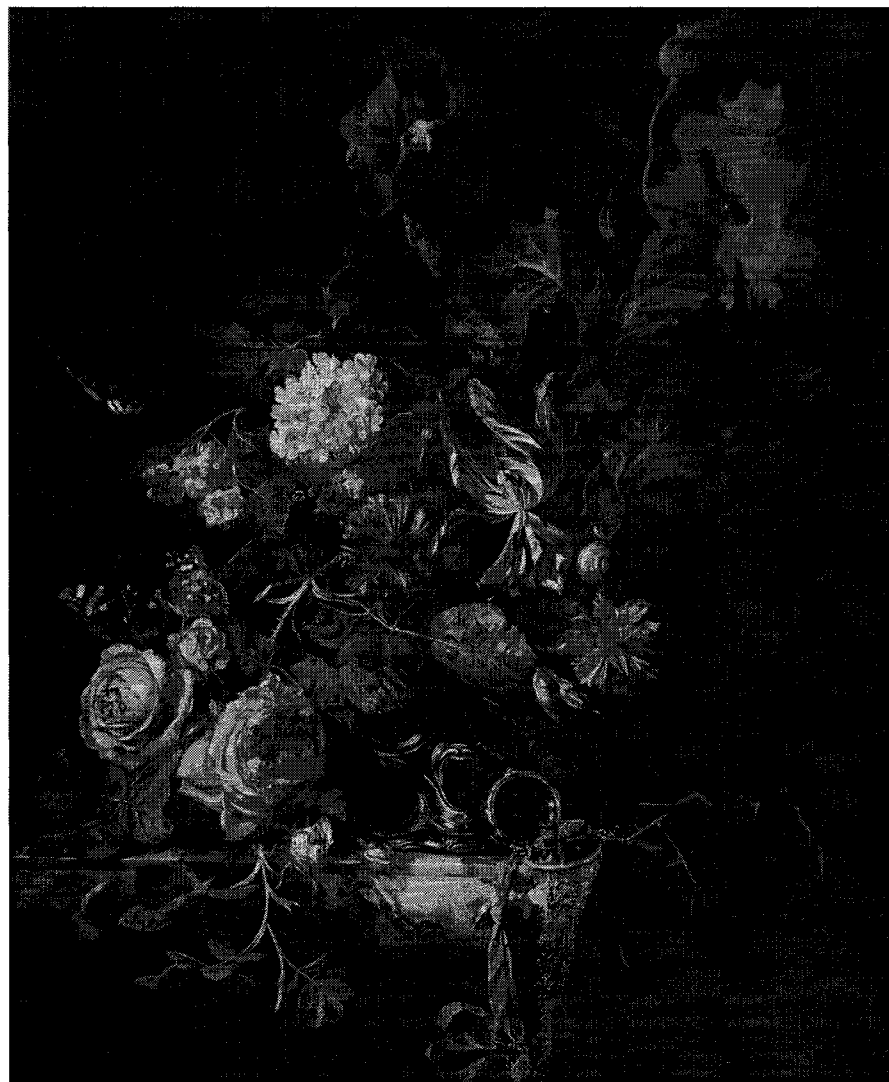


Figure 21: Willem van Aelst, *Flower Still Life with a Watch*, 1663 Legion of Honor Museum, San Francisco (66 x 53 cm)



Figure 22: Rachel Ruysch, *Still Life with Flowers*, 1716 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

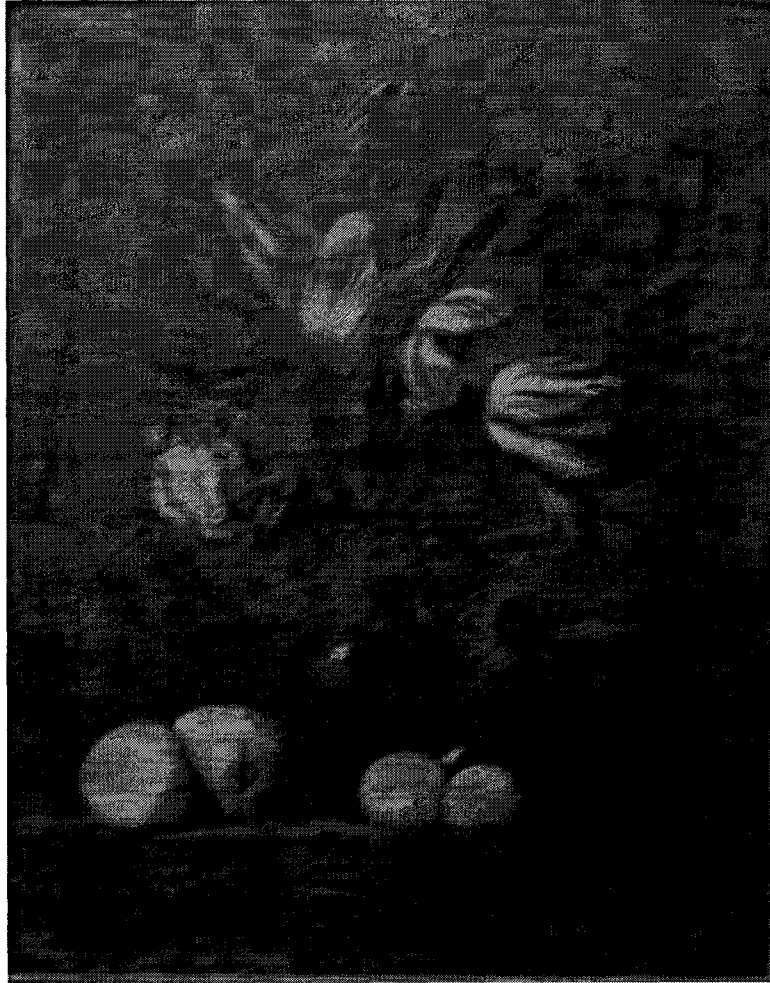


Figure 23: Willem van Aelst, *Flower Still Life with Fruit*, 1643 London, The Hallsborough Gallery, 1966 (44 x 36 cm)

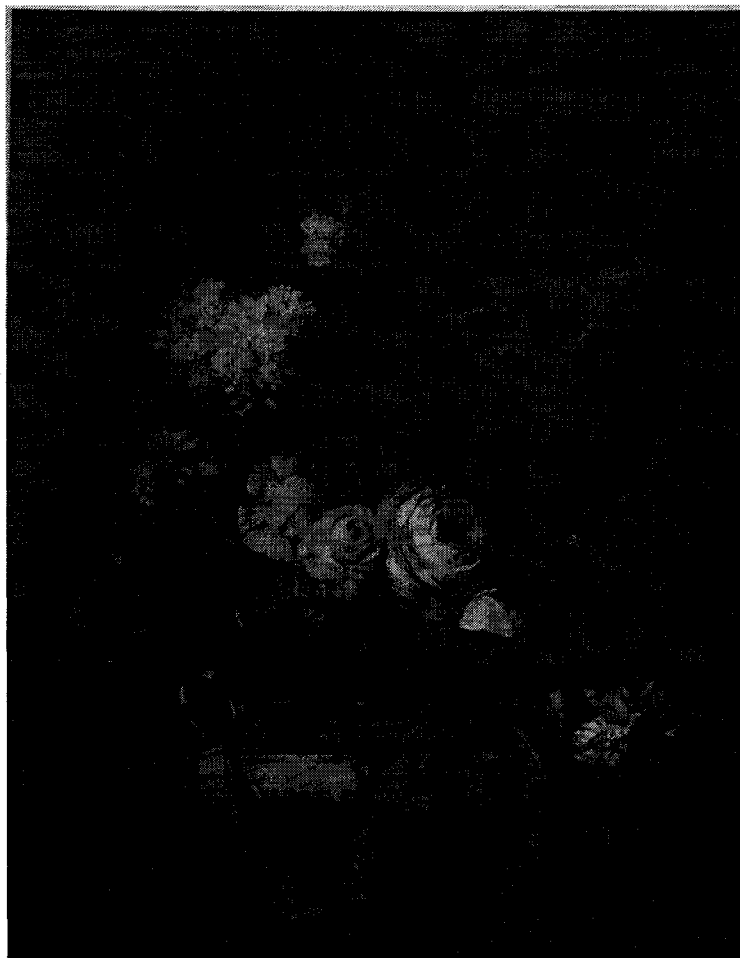


Figure 24: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life with Flowers and a Pocketwatch*, 1678, Staatliches Museum, Schwerin. 73 x 57.3 cm (73 x 57.3 cm)

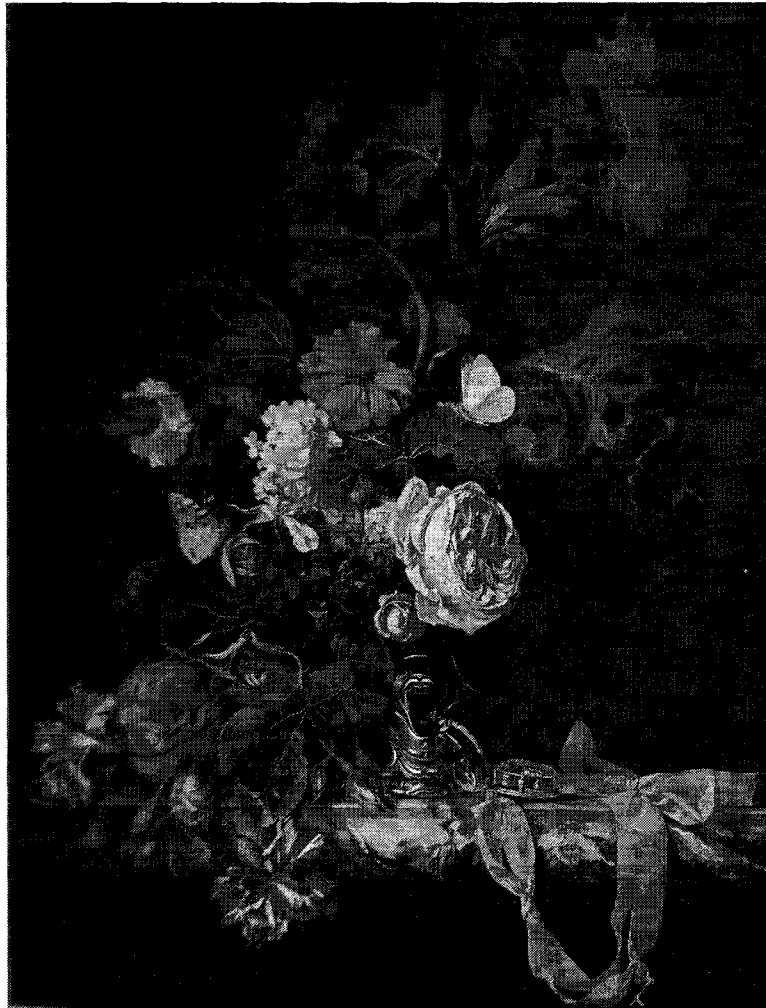


Figure 25: Willem van Aelst, *Flower Still Life with a Watch*, 1663, The Hague, Mauritshuis. 62.5 x 49 cm (62.5 x 49 cm)



Figure 26: Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Still Life with Garland of Flowers and a Golden Tazza*, 1618, Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts

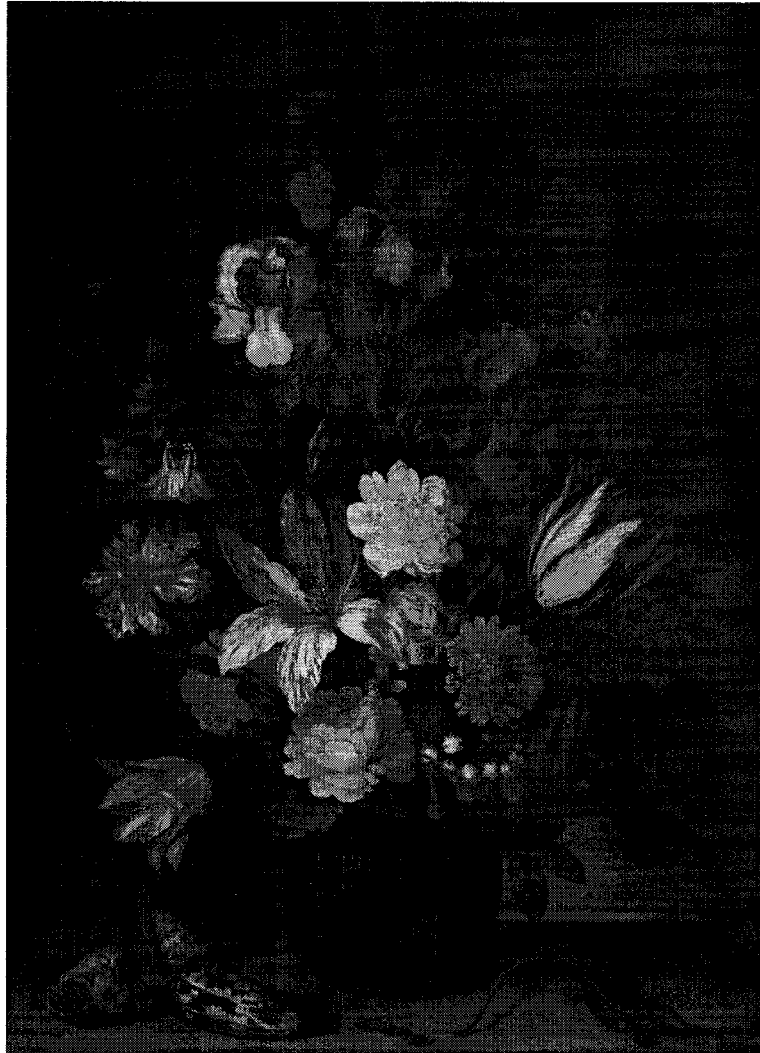


Figure 27: Balthasar van der Ast, *Still Life with Flowers*, 1625-30, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

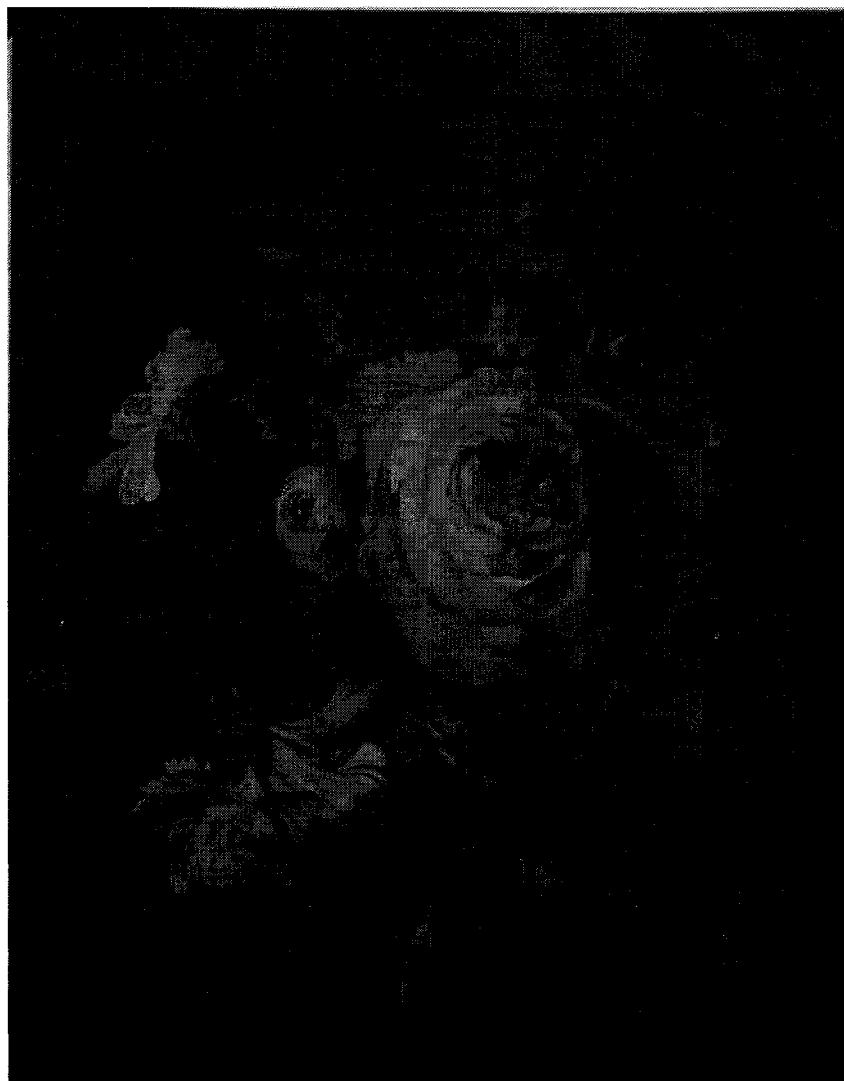


Figure 28: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life of Flowers*, 1677, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum
(32 x 26 cm)



Figure 29: Willem van Aelst, *Group of Flowers*, 1675, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum
(31.1 x 25.4 cm)

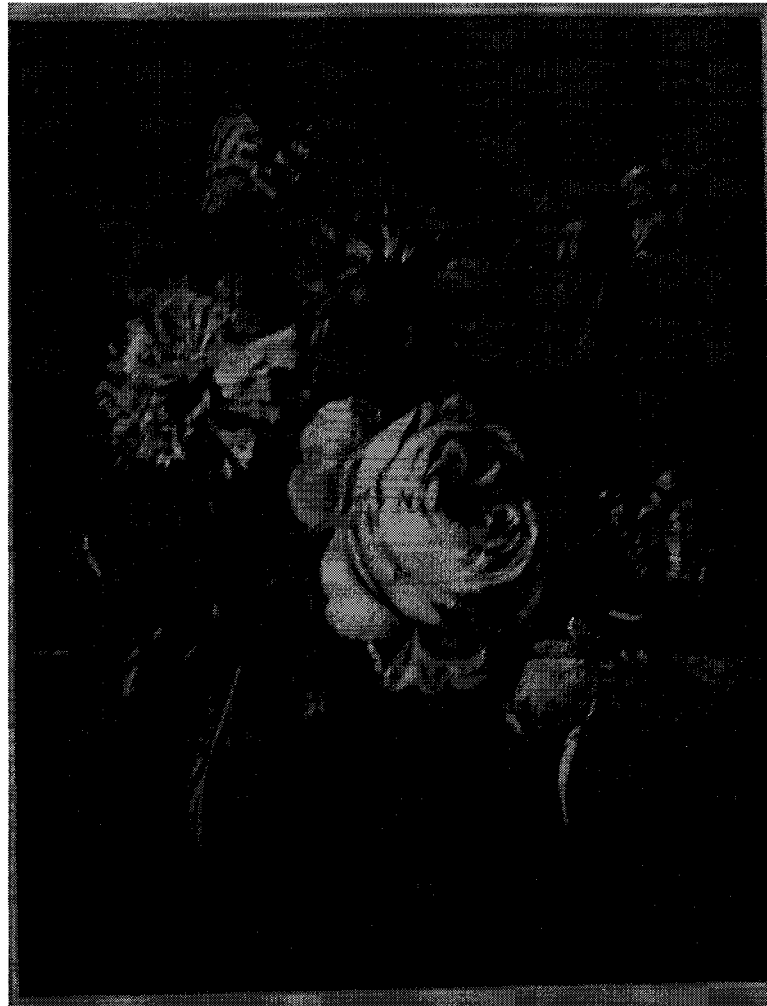


Figure 30: Willem van Aelst, *A Pink Rose and a Red and White Pink, a Marigold and other Flowers with Butterflies on a Marble Ledge*, 1677. Zürich, David Koetser, 1992/1995. (32 x 26 cm)

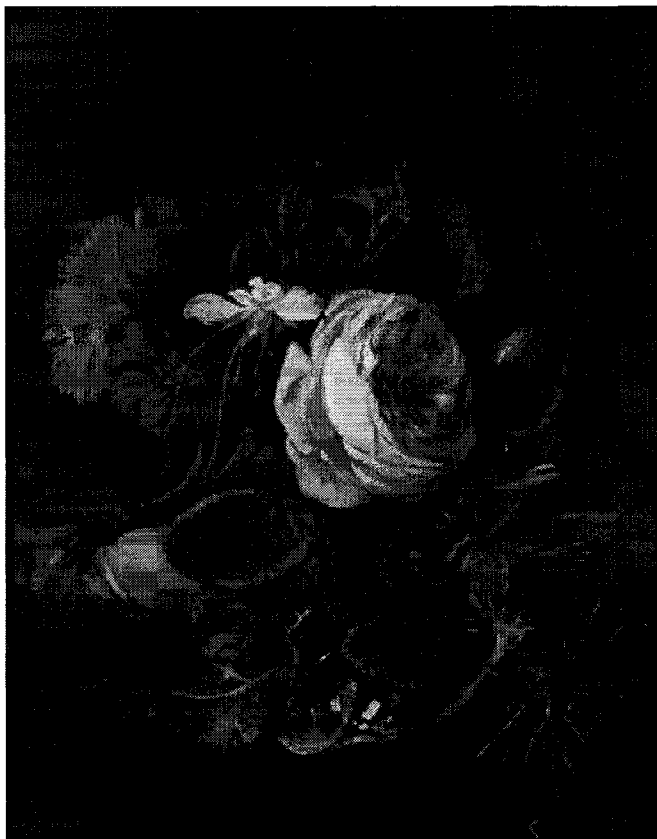


Figure 31: Willem van Aelst, *Flowers with a Butterfly on a Marble Ledge*, 1676, London, Christie's 1999-07-09 nr. 27 (31.7 x 25.4 cm)

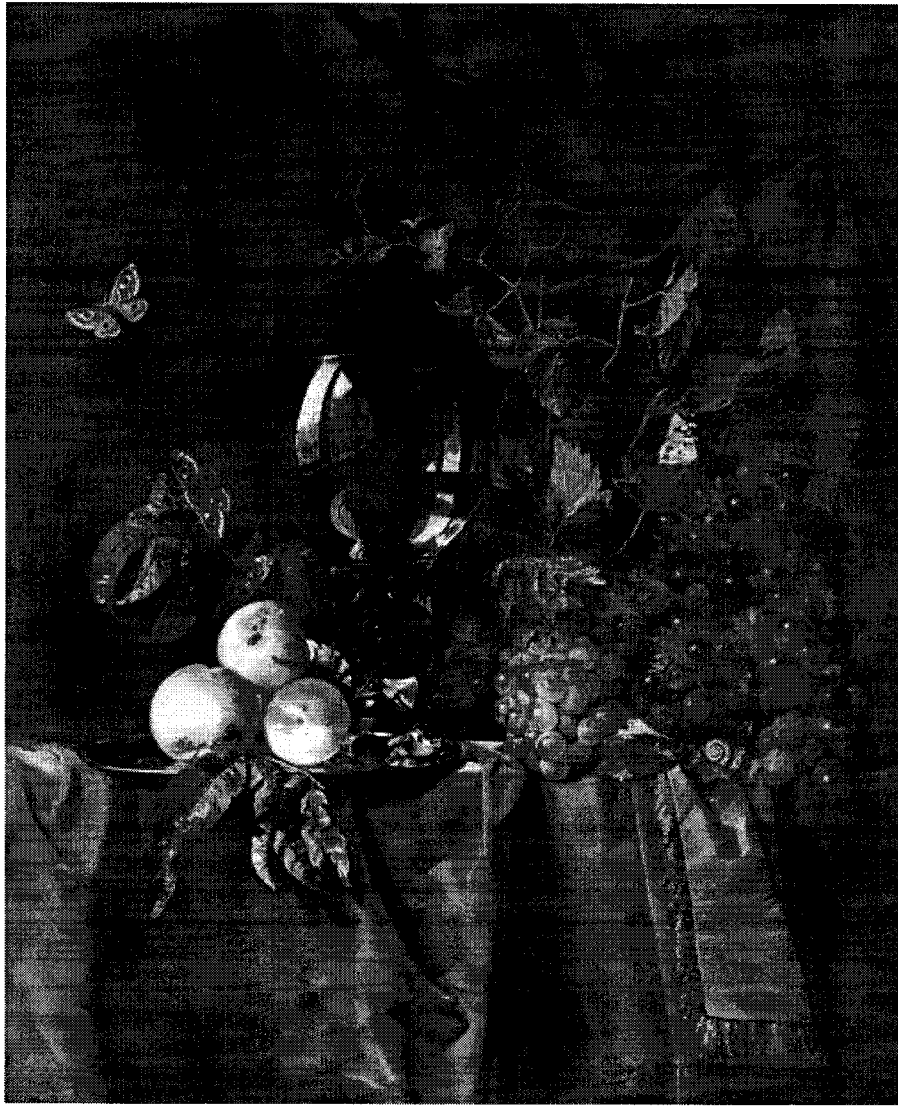


Figure 32: Willem van Aelst, *Fruits and a Wineglass*, 1659. Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunst. (81.2 x 66 cm)

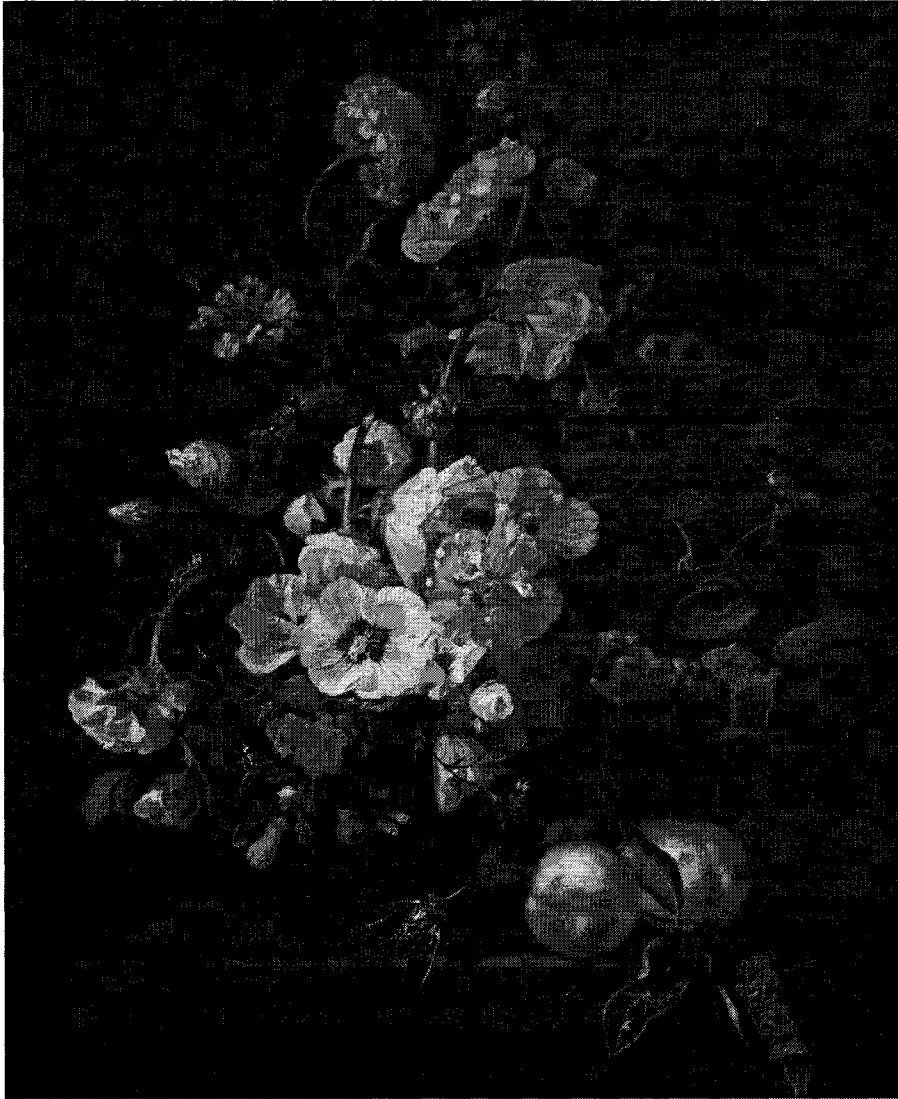


Figure 33: Rachel Ruysch, *A Vase of Flowers*, 1701. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum

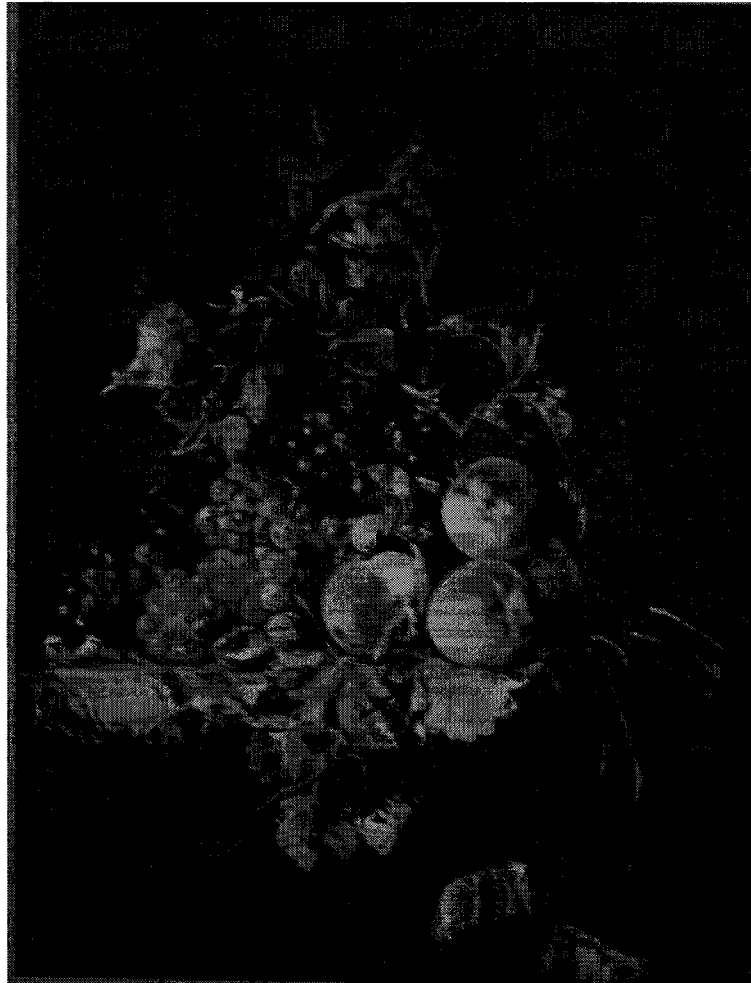


Figure 34: Willem van Aelst, *Fruit Piece with Peaches and Grapes*, 1670, New York/Paris, B. Habeldt, 1991 (74.5 x 56 cm)

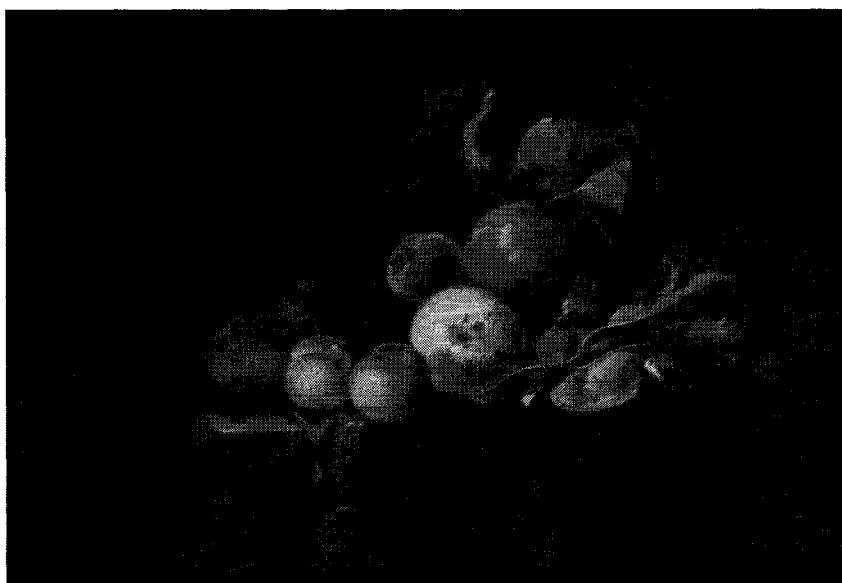


Figure 35: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life of Plums, Peaches Almonds and Grapes on a Draped Ledge*, 1650. Currently with Otto Naumann (30.2 x 46.6 cm)

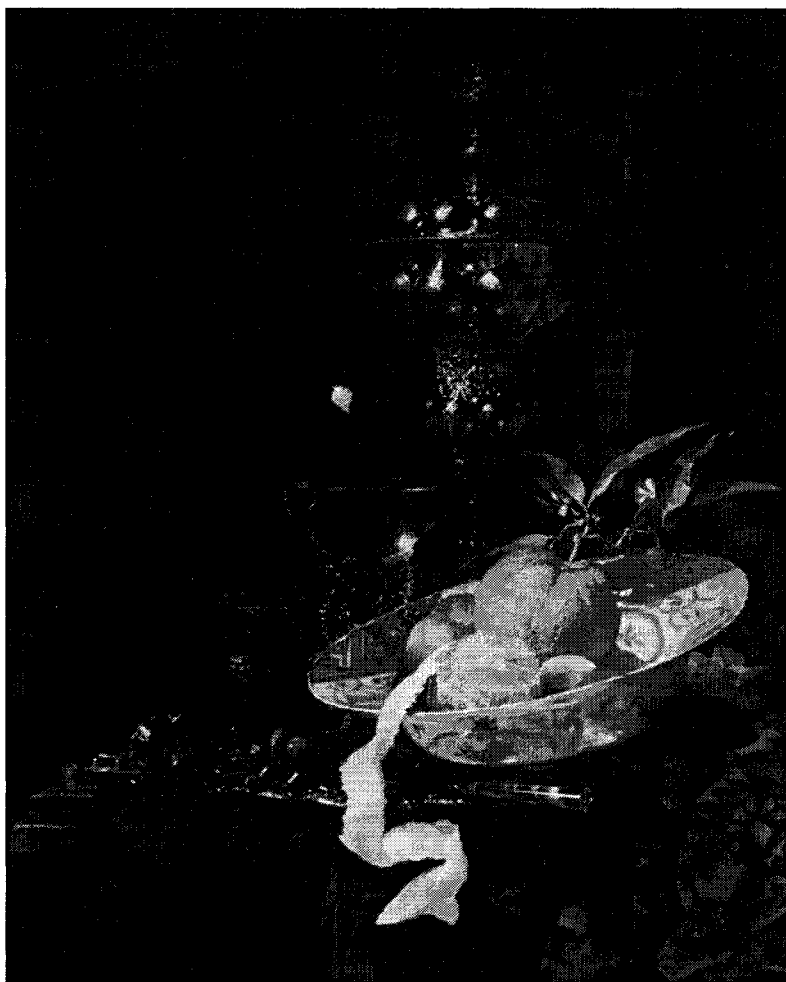


Figure 36: Willem Kalf, *Still Life with an Oriental Rug*, c. 1660's Ashmolean Museum, Oxford



Figure 37: Jan Davidsz de Heem, *Still Life with Fruit and Lobster*, 1648-49, Staatliche Museen, Berlin



Figure 38: Balthasar van der Ast, *Fruit Still Life with Shells*, 1620, Mauritshuis Royal Picture Gallery

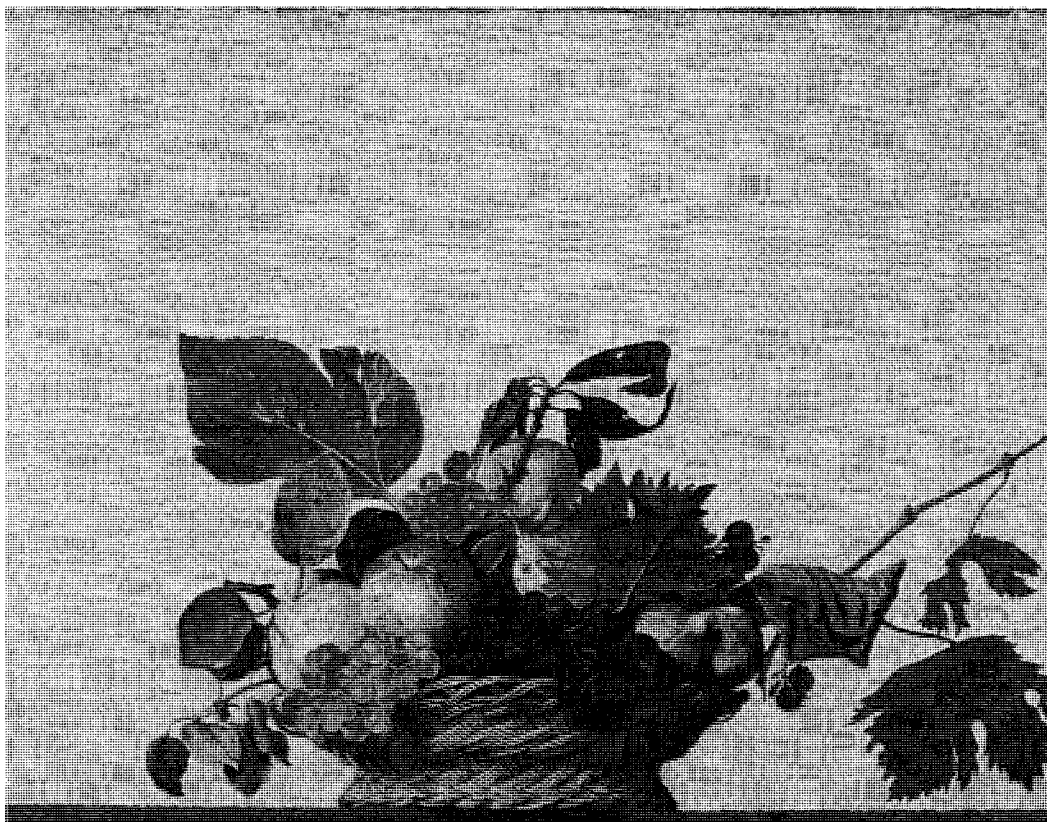


Figure 39: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Basket of Fruit*, c. 1597, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan



Figure 40: Jan Davidsz de Heem, *Festoon of Fruits and Flowers Hanging from a Ring Before a Niche*, 1660-1670, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



Figure 41: Jan van Huysum, *Fruit Piece*, 1722, Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum



Figure 42: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life of Fruit*, c. 1654, Florence, Palazzo Pitti (48 x 64.5 cm)



Figure 43: Wille van Aelst, *Still Life of Vegetables, Ram's Head and Game*, 1652, Florence, Palazzo Pitti (125.5 x 99.5 cm)

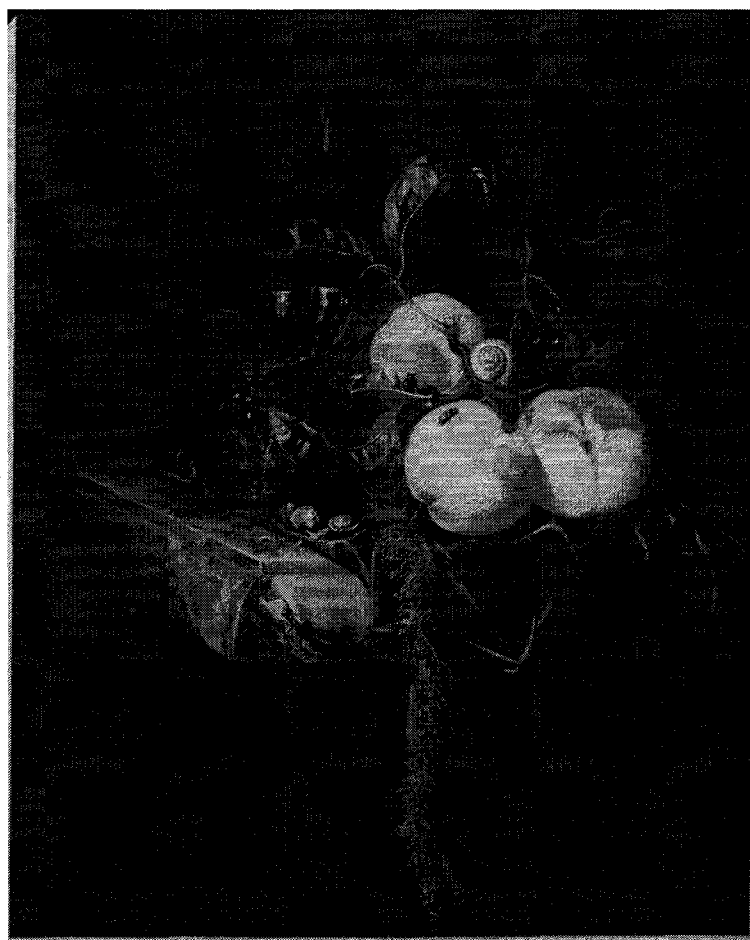


Figure 44: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life with Fruits*, 1667, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest
(56 x 44 cm)



Figure 45: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life with Fruit*, 1681, Saint Petersburg, Hermitage Museum (58 x 47 cm)

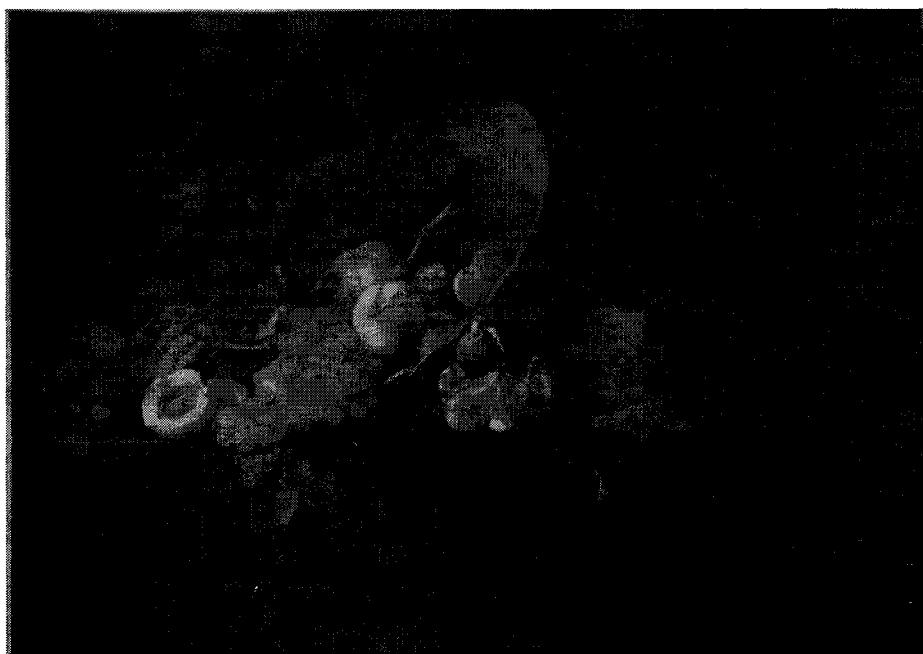


Figure 46: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life of Fruit*, 1653 Palazzo Pitti, Florence
(77 x 102 cm)

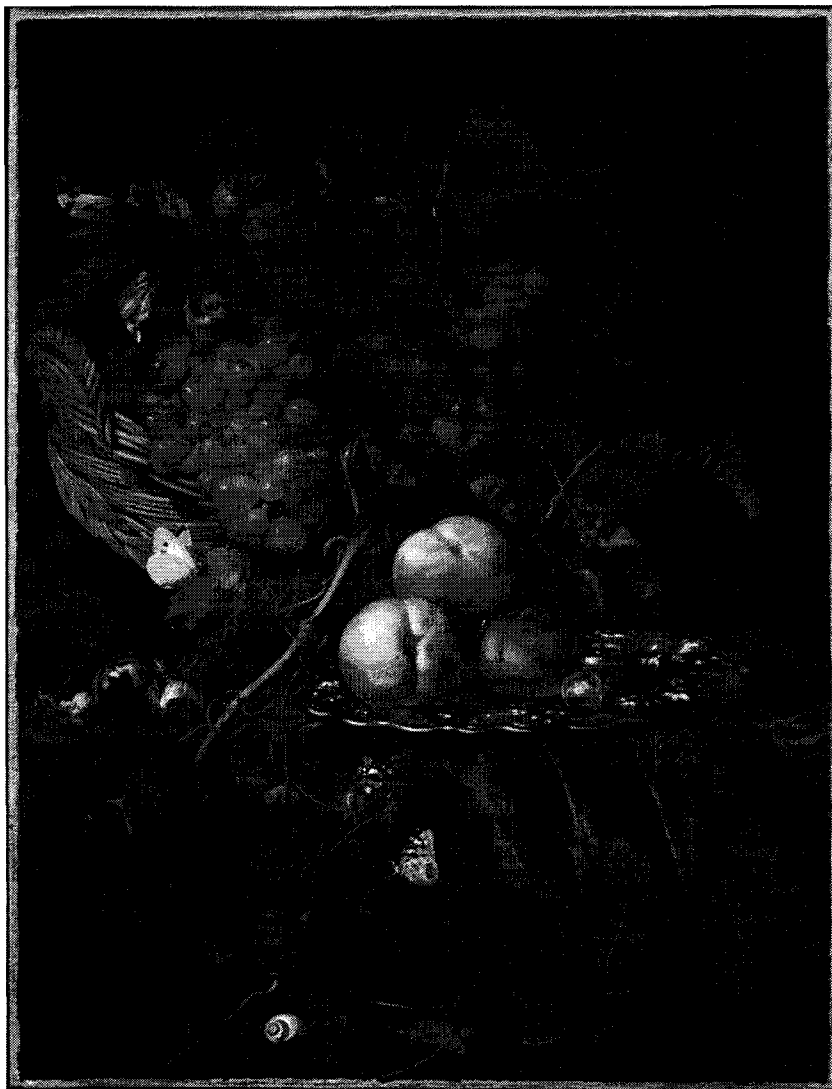


Figure 47: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life with a Basket of Grapes, a Silver Dish and Chestnuts on a Stone Ledge with a Red Velvet Cloth*, c. 1677, Private Collection (74 x 56 cm)



Figure 48: Balthasar van de Ast, *Basket of Fruits*, 1622, National Gallery of Art, Washington

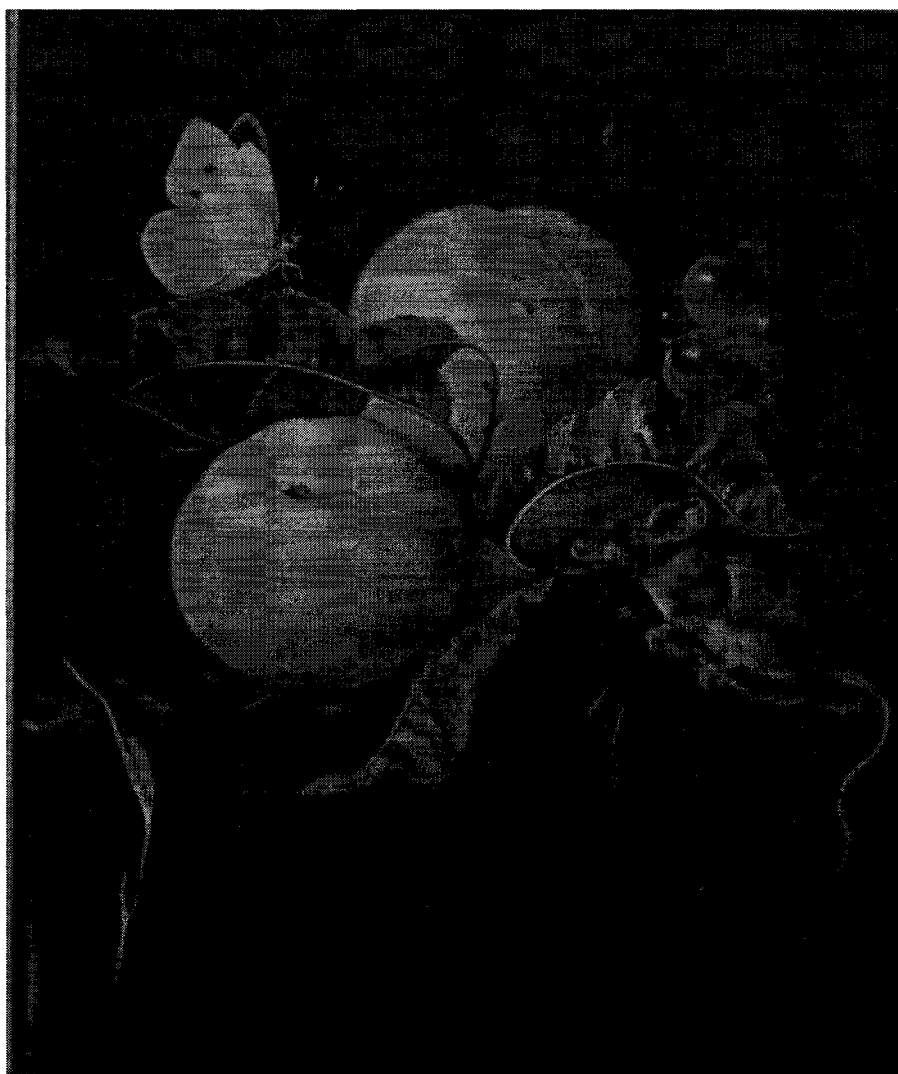


Figure 49: Willem van Aelst, *Fruit Still Life with a Mouse*, 1674 Private Collection
(29.7 x 24.4 cm)

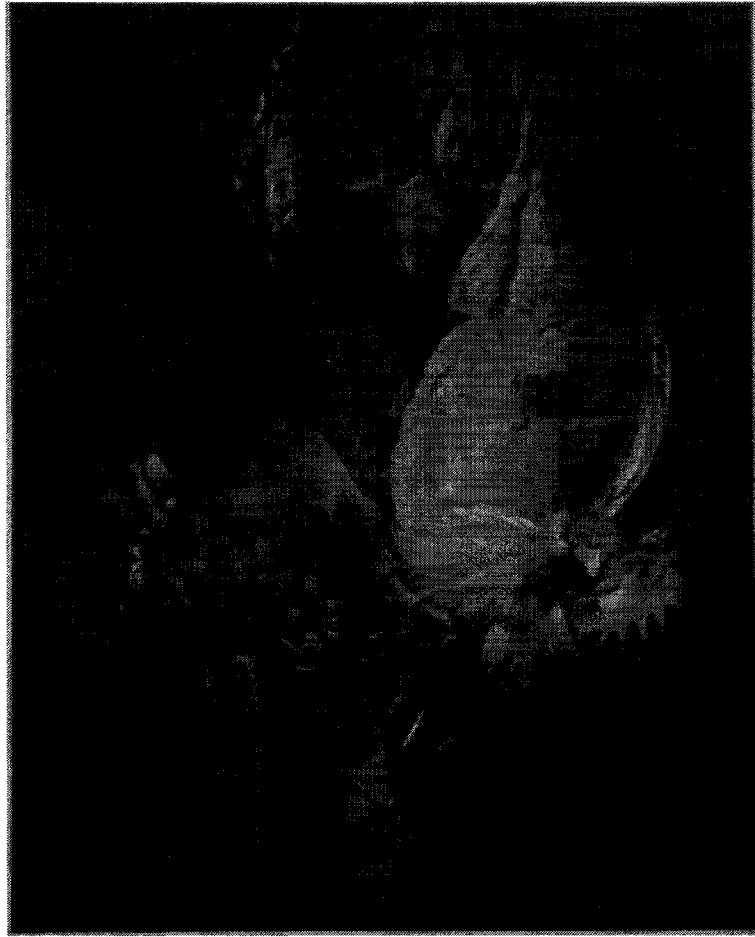


Figure 50: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life with Dead Game*, 1661, Washington, National Gallery of Art (84.7 x 67.3 cm)

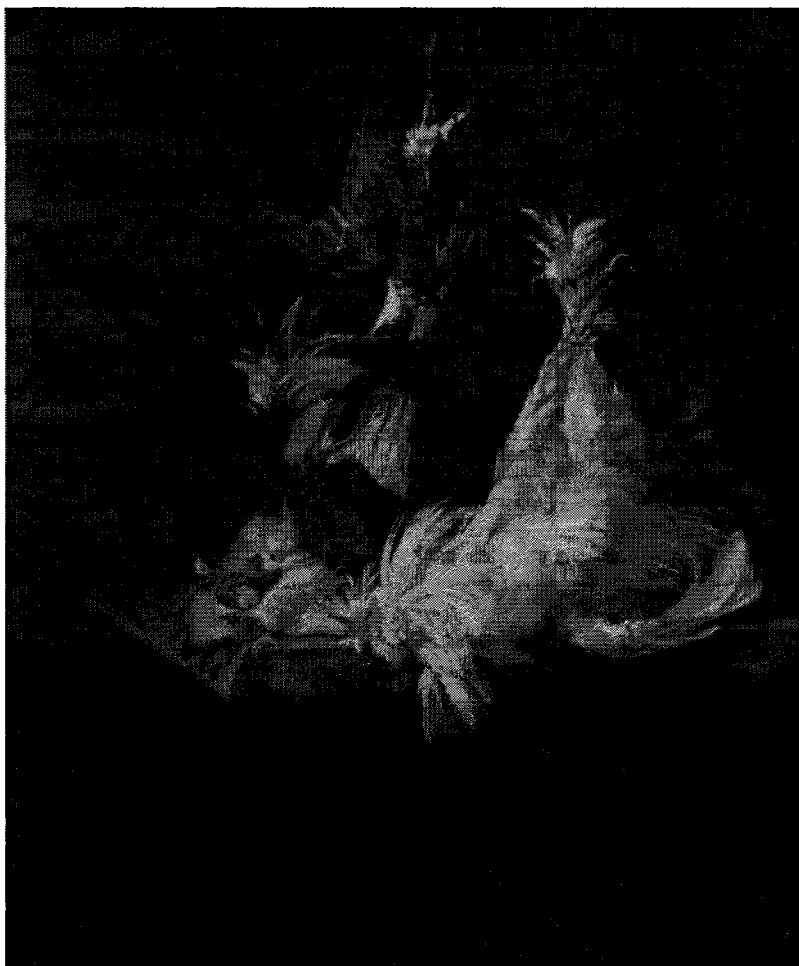


Figure 51: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life with Birds*, 1658 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
(95 x 78.5 cm)

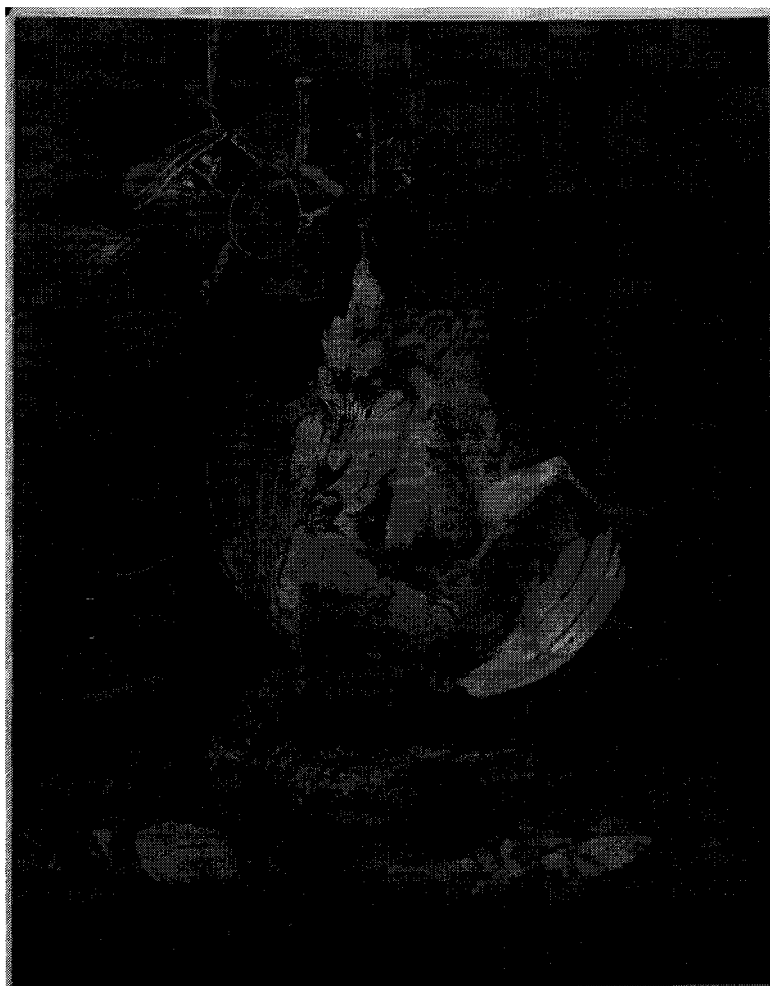


Figure 52: Willem van Aelst, *Hunt Still Life with Falcon Hood*, 1671 Staatliches Museum, Schwerin (57.5 x 45.7 cm)



Figure 53: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life: Dead Game and Implements of Sport*, 1657
Hampton Court Palace, London (105.5 x 90 cm)



Figure 54: Cornelis Lelienbergh, *Still Life of Dead Birds*, 1654 Philadelphia Museum of Art

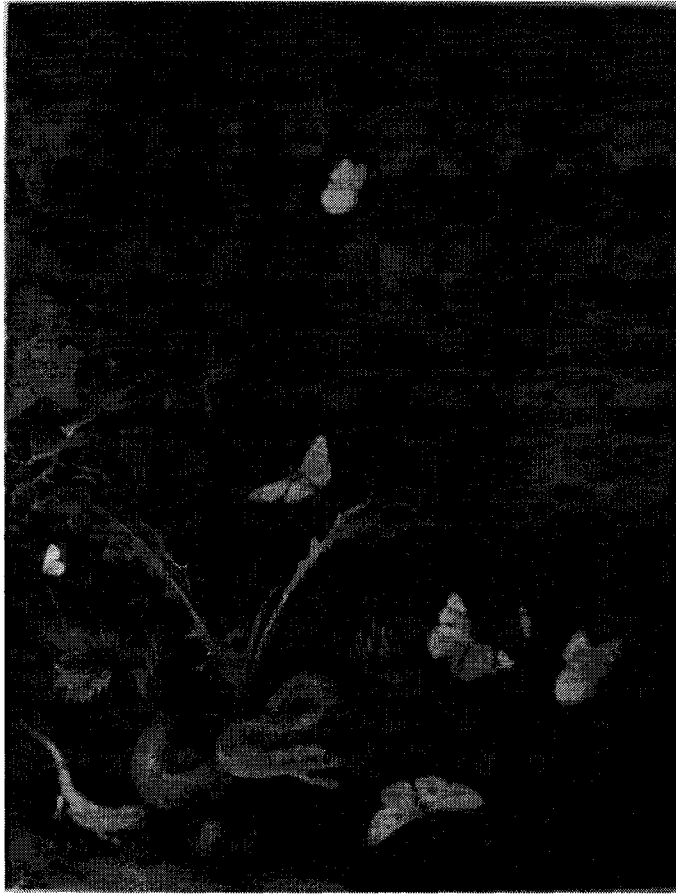


Figure 55: Otto Marseus van Schrieck, *Forest Floor with Ringsnake and Lizard*, 1669
Staatliches Museum, Schwerin

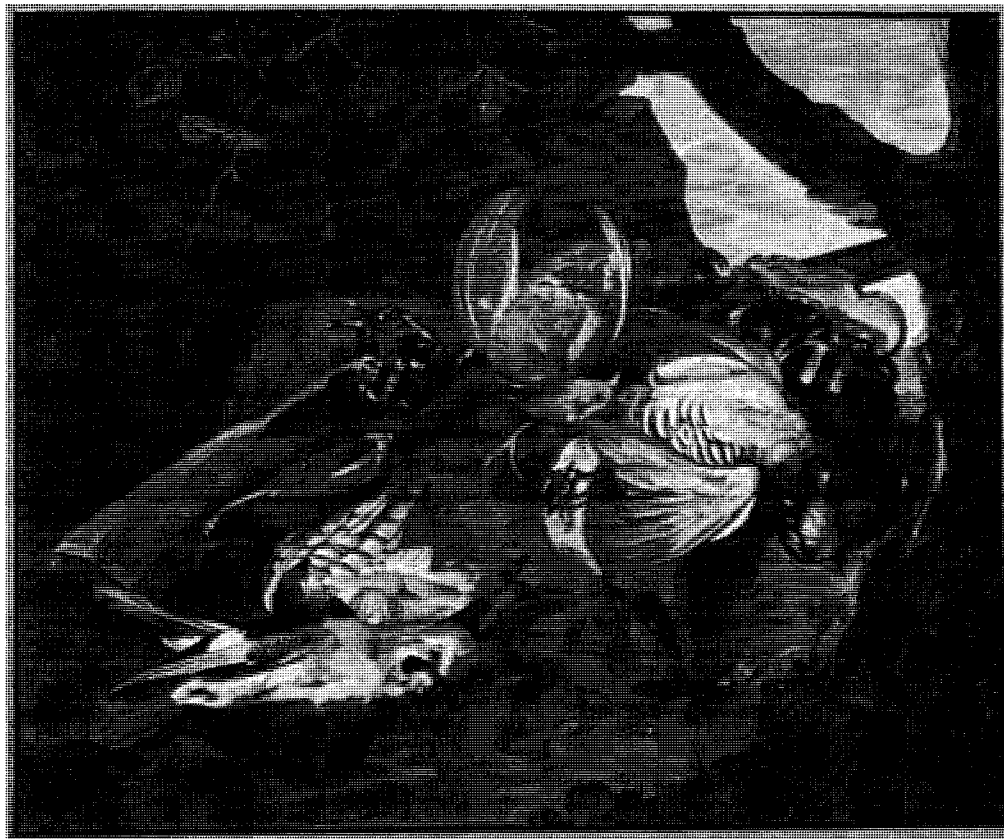


Figure 56: Willem van Aelst, *Dead Birds and Hunting Equipment under a Tree*, 1654
Rafael Valls, Ltd. London 1999-2004 (61 x 75 cm)

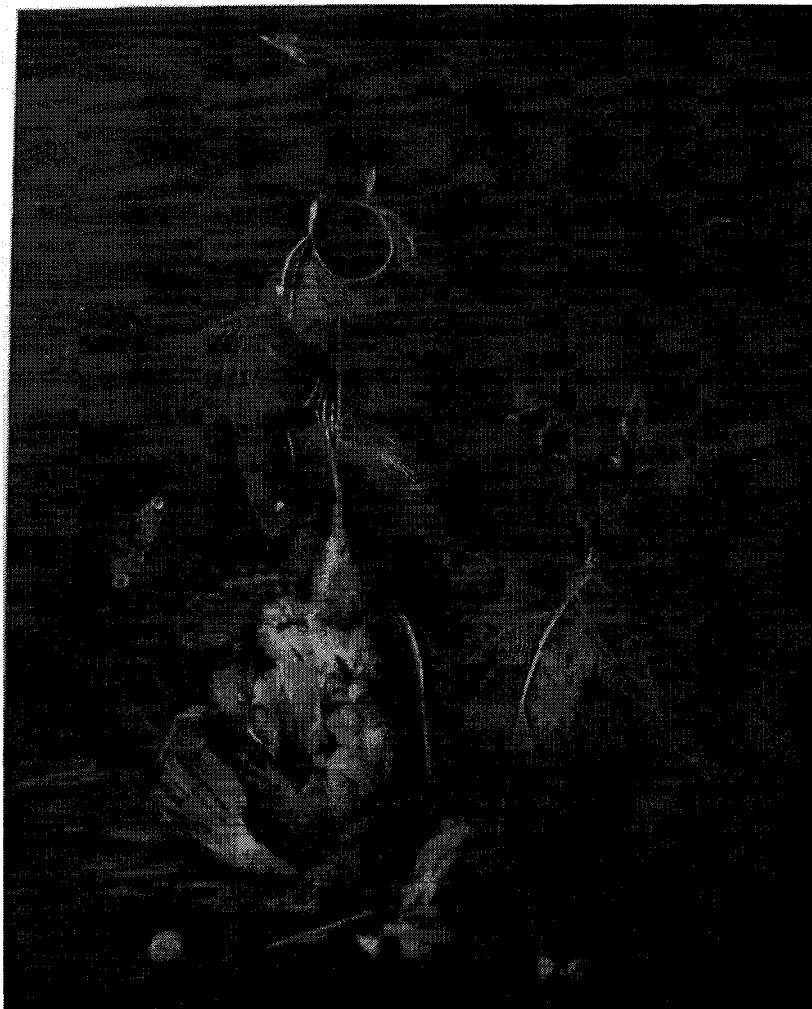


Figure 57: Willem van Aelst, *Forest Floor Still Life with Game*, c. 1671 Schwerin, Staatliches Museum (73 x 58.5 cm)



Figure 58: Willem van Aelst, *Forest Floor Still Life with Hunt and Chameleon*, 1671
Berlin (Lepke) Sale December 3-5, 1907, nr. 247 (80 x 62 cm)

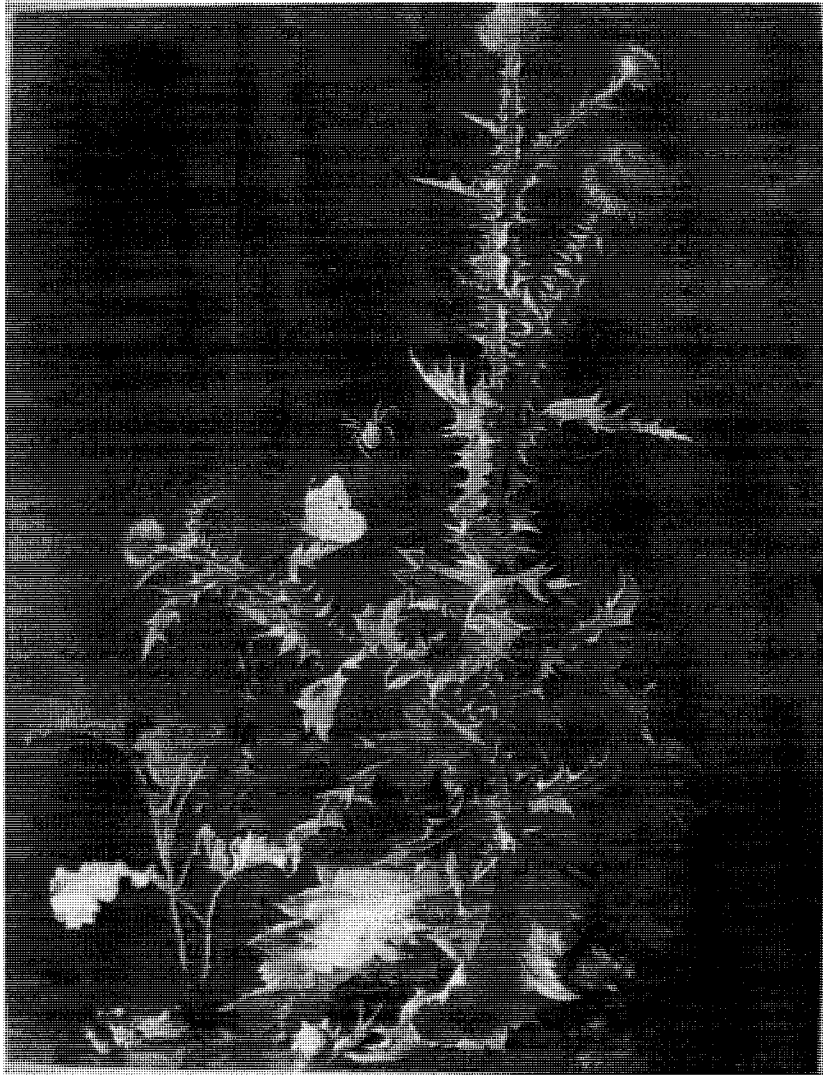


Figure 59: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life with Thistle*, 1671 Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe (75 x 56.8 cm)

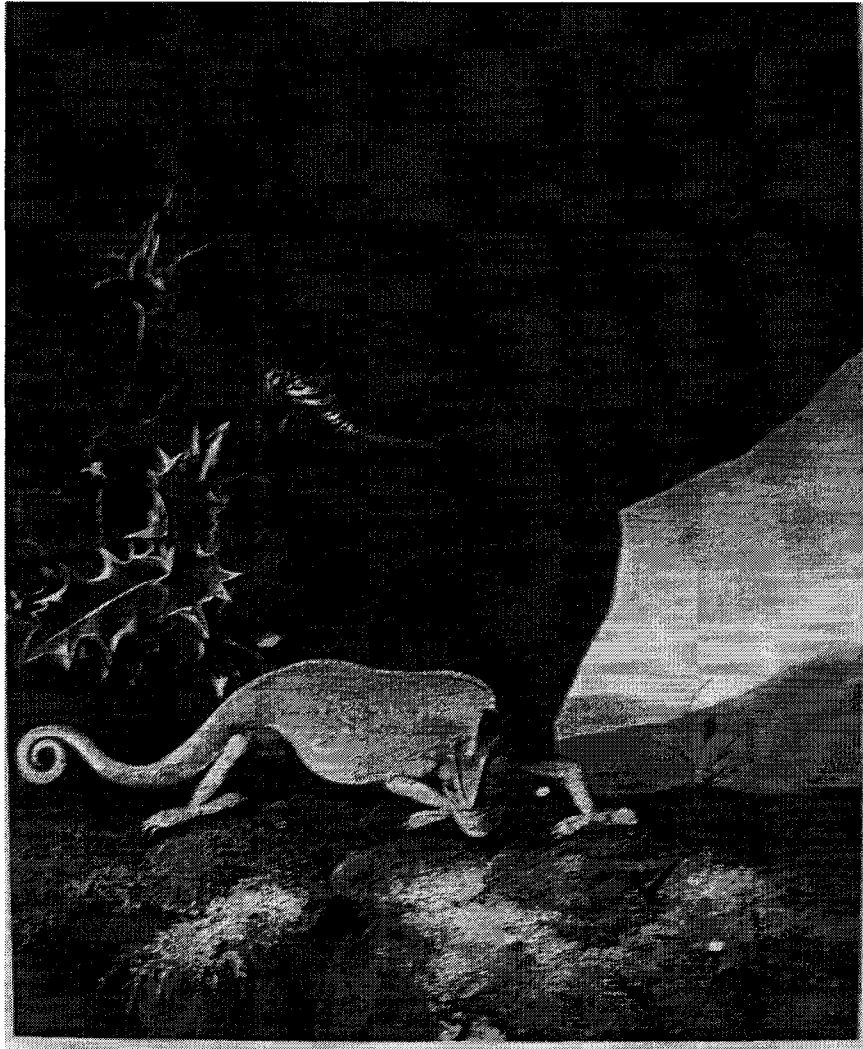


Figure 60: Willem van Aelst *A Chameleon with a Dragonfly on a Thistle in a Landscape*, 1670 Rafael Valls, 2002, London (46.2 x 34.2 cm)

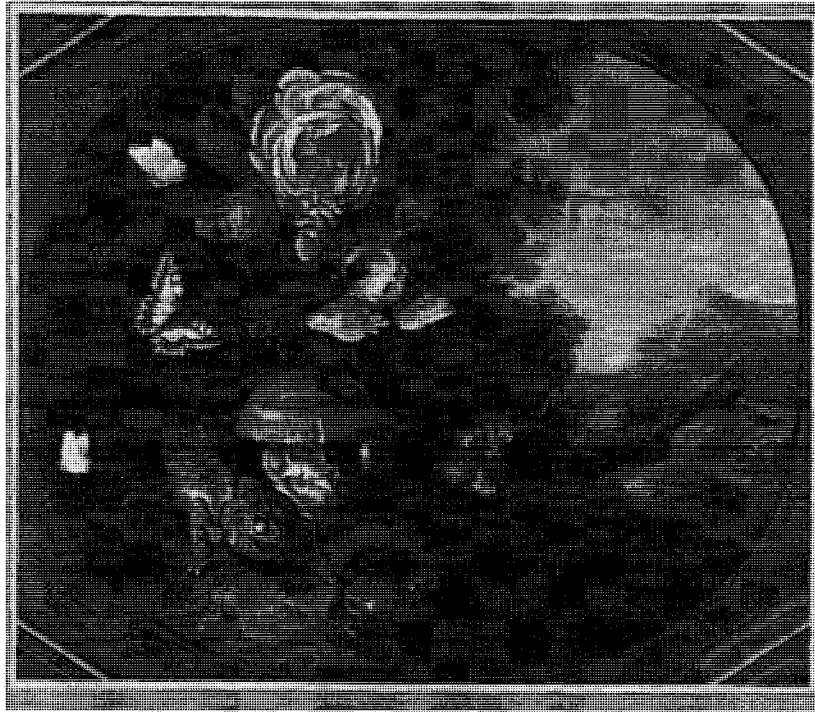


Figure 61: Willem van Aelst, *Forest Floor Still Life with Chameleon and Roses*, c. 1670 Vienna, Dorotheum, October 7, 1998, nr. 290 (43 x 56 cm)



Figure 62: Otto Marseus van Schrieck, *Still Life with Flowers*, undated, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge



Figure 63: Joachim Beuckelaer, *The Four Elements: Water*, 1569, National Gallery, London

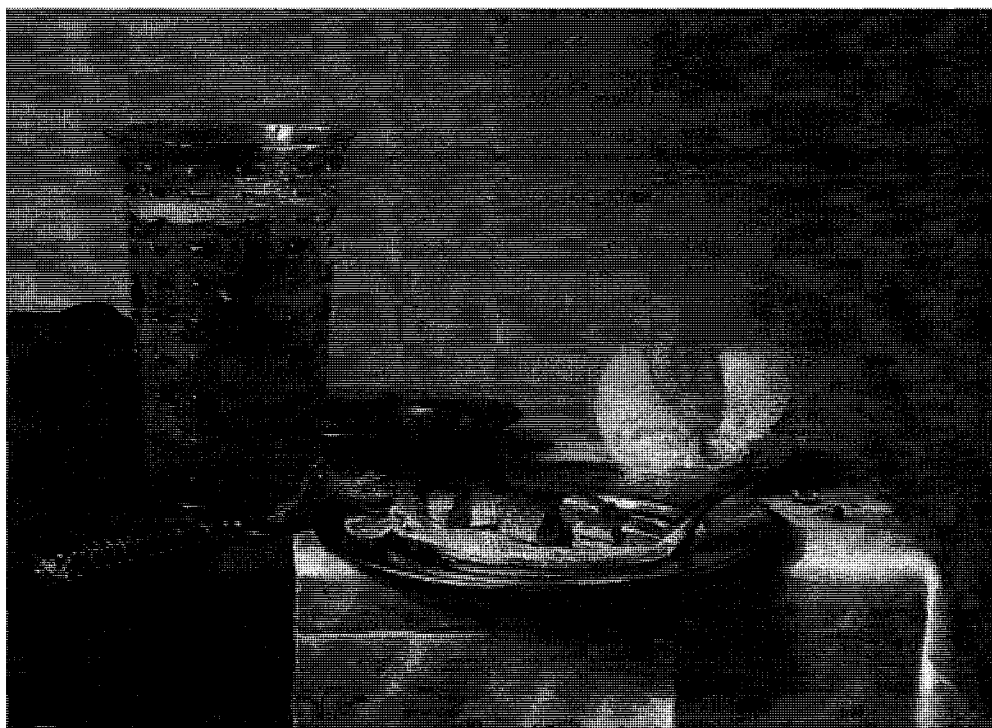


Figure 64: Pieter Claesz, *Still Life with Herring*, 1636 Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam



Figure 65: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life of Fish and Game*, 1653 Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, Florence (84 x 102 cm)

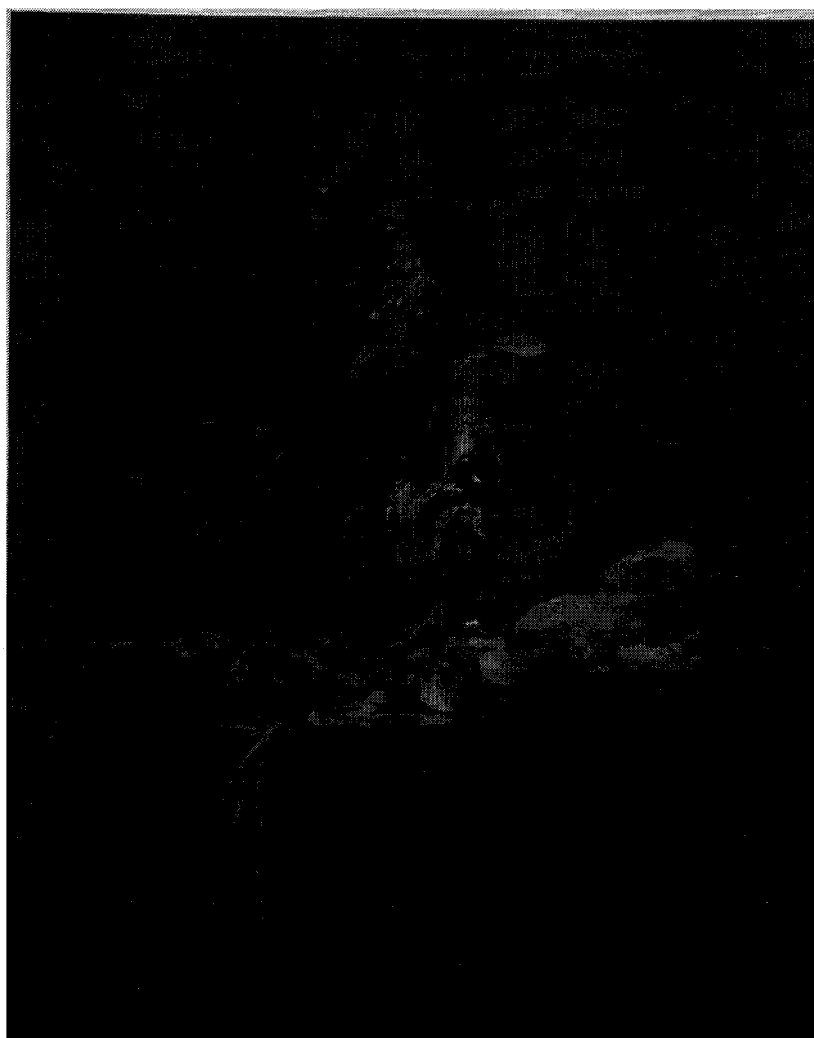


Figure 66: Willem van Aelst, *Breakfast Piece with Silver Pitcher*, 1657 Staatens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen (64 x 58 cm)

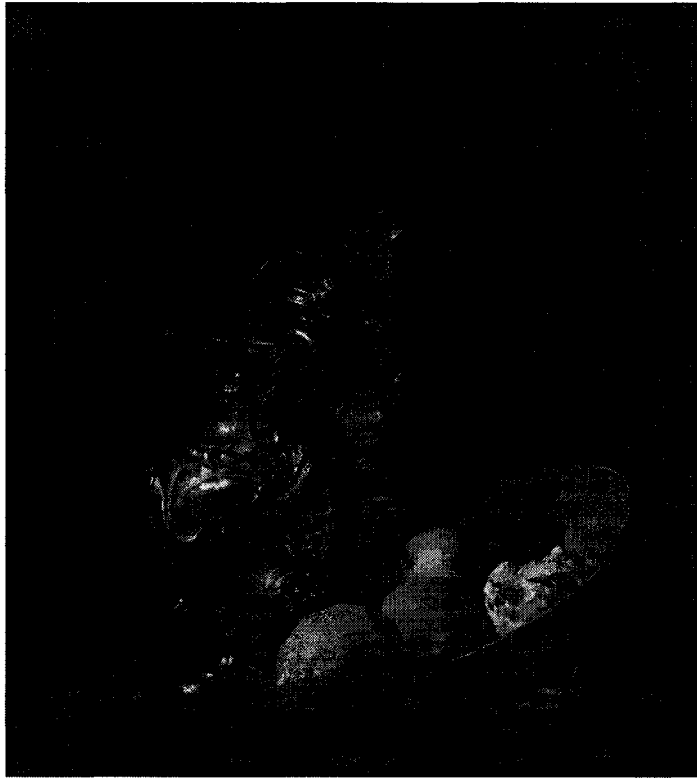


Figure 67: Willem Kalf, *Still Life with a Silver Jug*, c. 1656 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

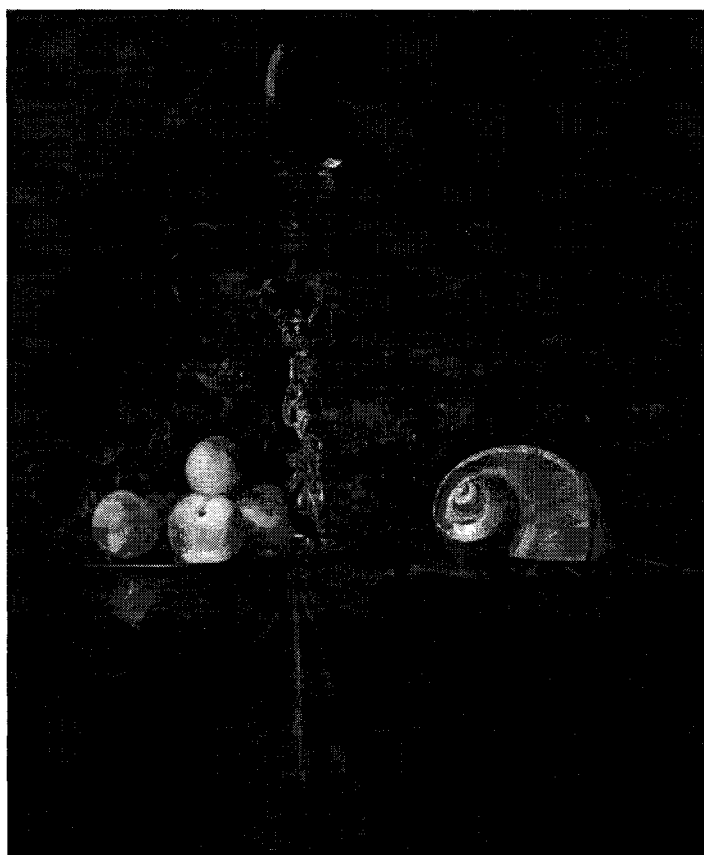


Figure 68: Willem van Aelst, *Pronk Still Life with Metalwork, Nautilus Shell and Fruit on a Dark Cloth*, 1659 Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin (84 x 70 cm)



Figure 69: Christiaen van Vianen, after design by his father Adam van Vianen, *Silver Pitcher*, 1632, Private collection



Figure 70: Joseph de Bray, *Still Life in Praise of the Pickled Herring*, 1656
Gemäldegalerie, Dresden



Figure 71: Willem van Aelst, *Pronk Still Life with Orpheus Zoutvat, Roemer and Other Glassware, Bread, Fish, Onions and a Hazelnut on a Dark Cloth*, 1678 Sotheby's New York, May 28, 1999 no. 41 (51.5 x 45 cm)

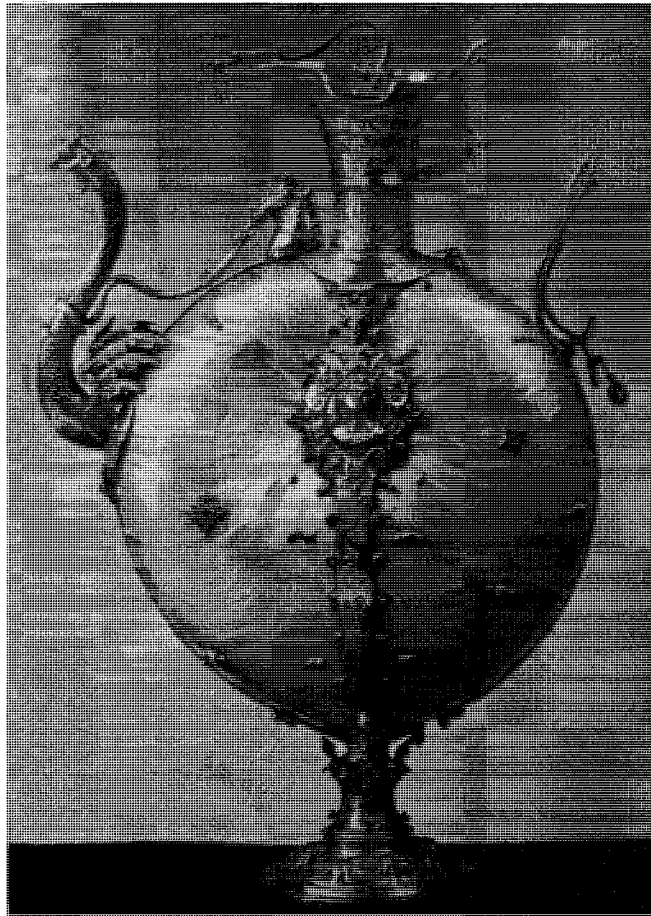


Figure 72: Flemish Manufacture, "*Mesciroba*" Made up of Double Nautilus, Sixteenth century, Museo degli Argenti, Florence

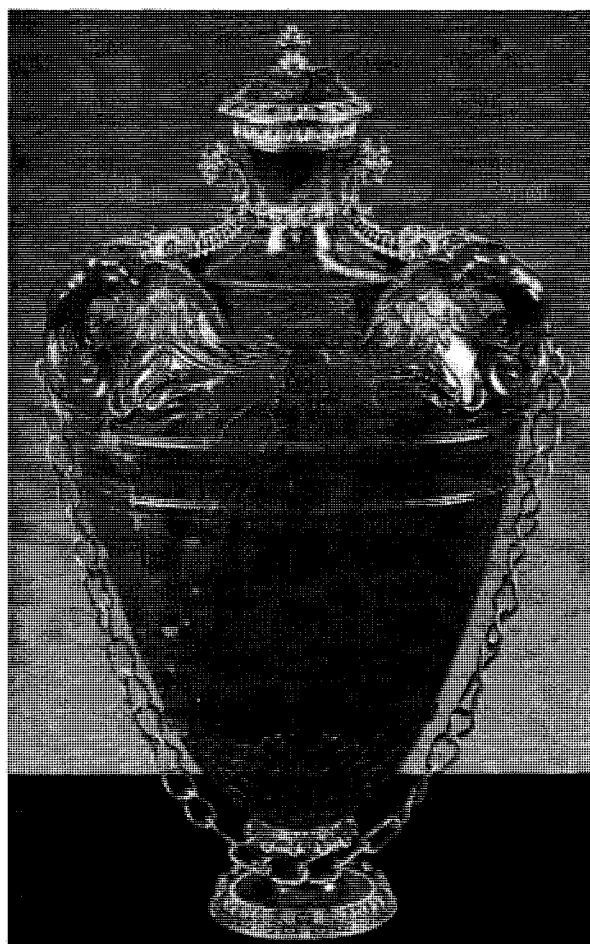
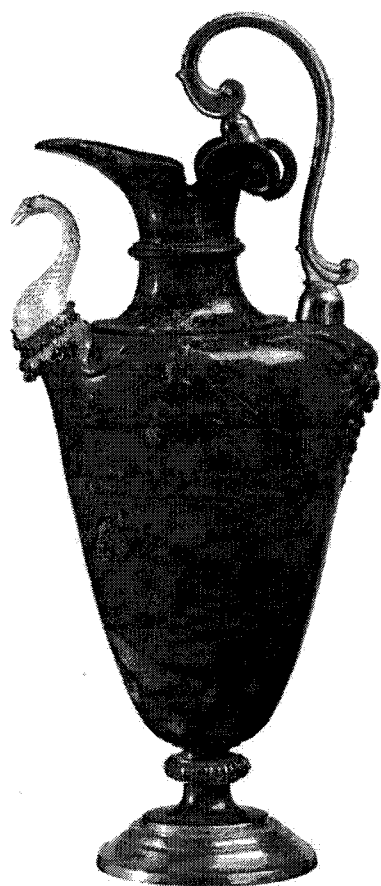


Figure 73: Two carved Lapis Lazuli vessels: L: Hans Domes: *Flagon in Lapis Lazuli*, Mid 16th century; R: Stefano Caroni after a design by Bernardo Buontalenti, setting by Jaques Bylivelt, *Flask with Cover*, 1583



Figure 74: Giovanna Garzoni, *Squash*, gouache on vellum, Private Collection



Figure 75: Bartolomeo Bimbi, *Squash from the Grand Ducal Garden at Pisa*, 1711
Sezione Botanica "F. Parlatore" del Museo di Storia Naturale, University of Florence

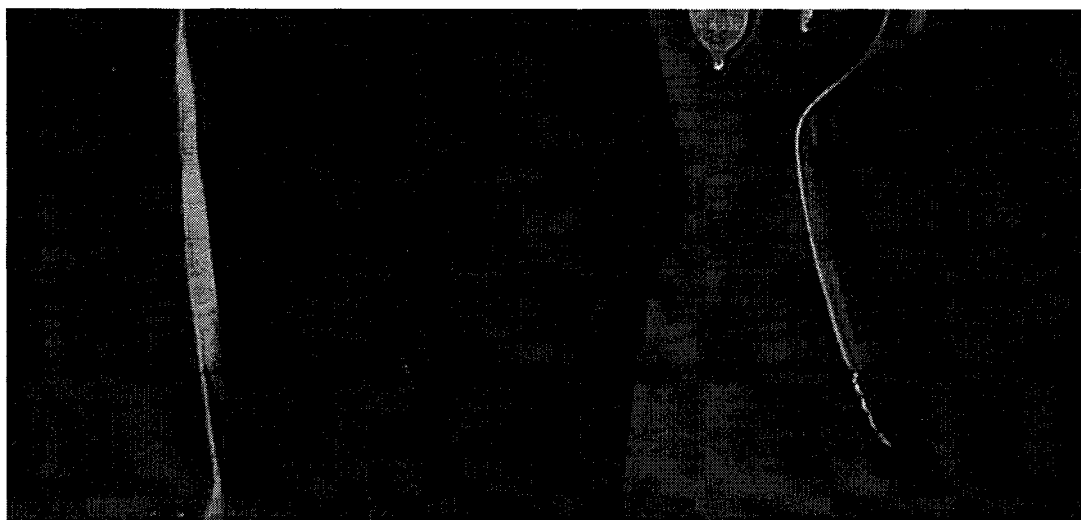
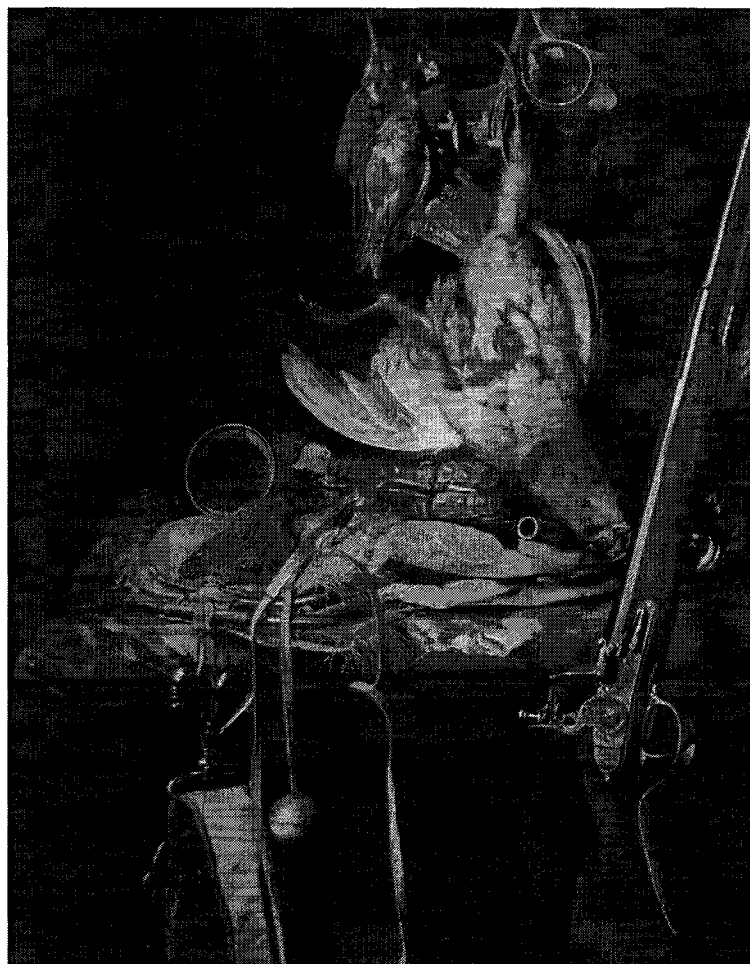


Figure 76: Willem van Aelst, *Dead Birds and Hunting Gear* (and detail image of frieze), 1664 Nationaal Museum, Stockholm (68 x 55 cm)



Figure 77: Gerrit Dou, *Maid-servant Emptying a Jug at a Window*, 1655, Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam

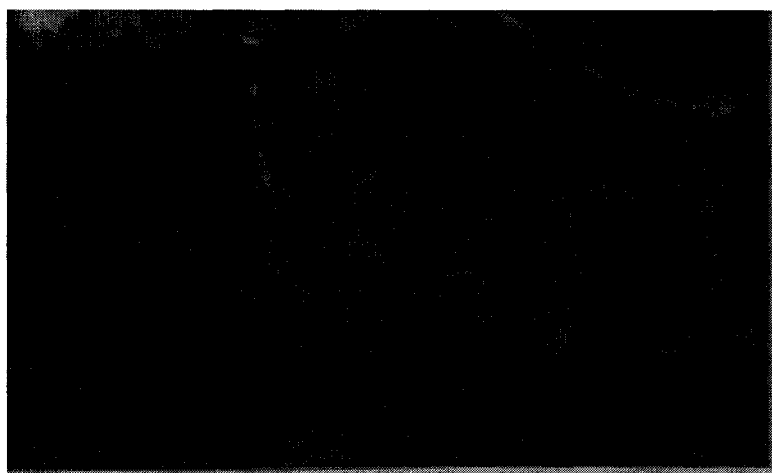


Figure 78: Willem van Aelst, *Two Dead Chickens* (along with detail of frieze), 1676, Staatliches Museum, Schwerin (100.5 x 82.5 cm)

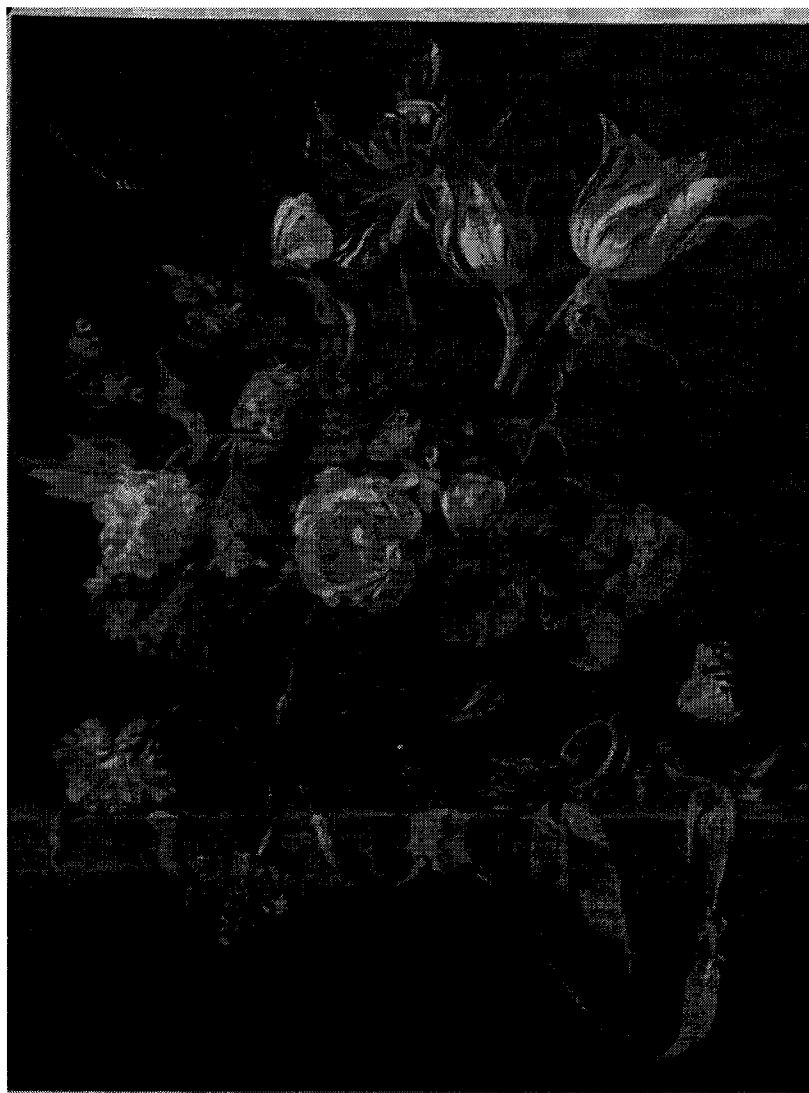


Figure 79: Willem van Aelst, *Vase of Flowers*, 1658 Private Collection
(57.8 x 45.7 cm)



Figure 80: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life of Game and a Blue Velvet Hunting Bag on a Marble Ledge*, c. 1665, Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston (65.5 x 52.5 cm)

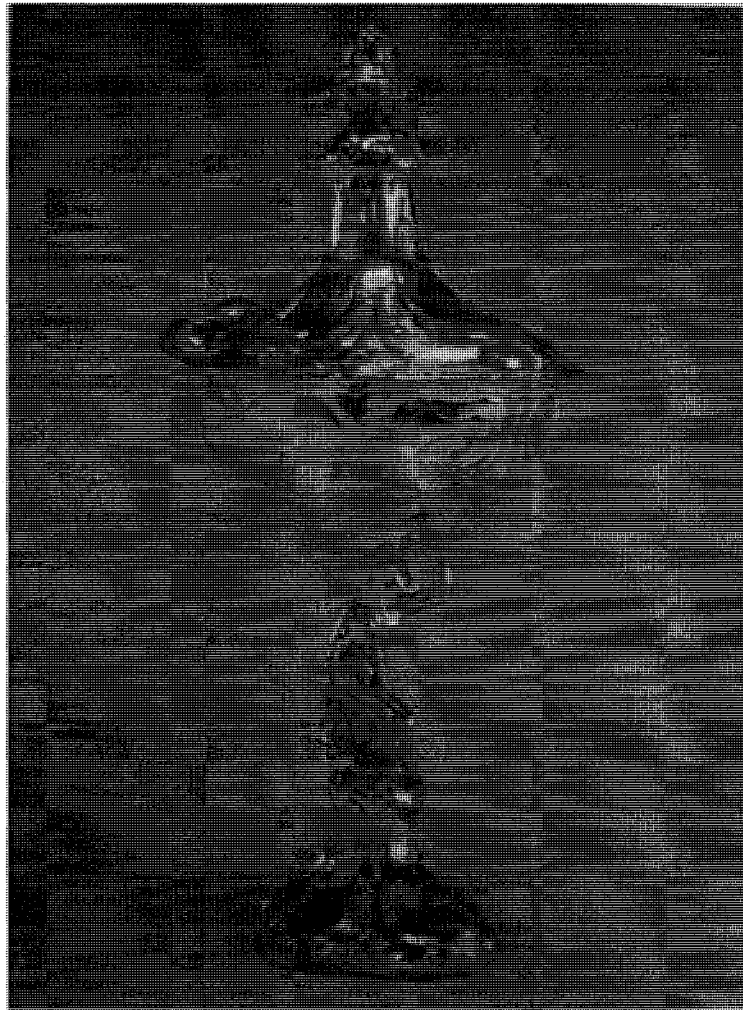


Figure 81: Johannes Lutma, *Cup and Cover*, 1639 Walters Art Museum, Baltimore



Figure 82: Johannes Lutma, *Drinking Cup with an Open Mouth on the Bottom and a Tortoise-Like Animal on the Edge*, 1641 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

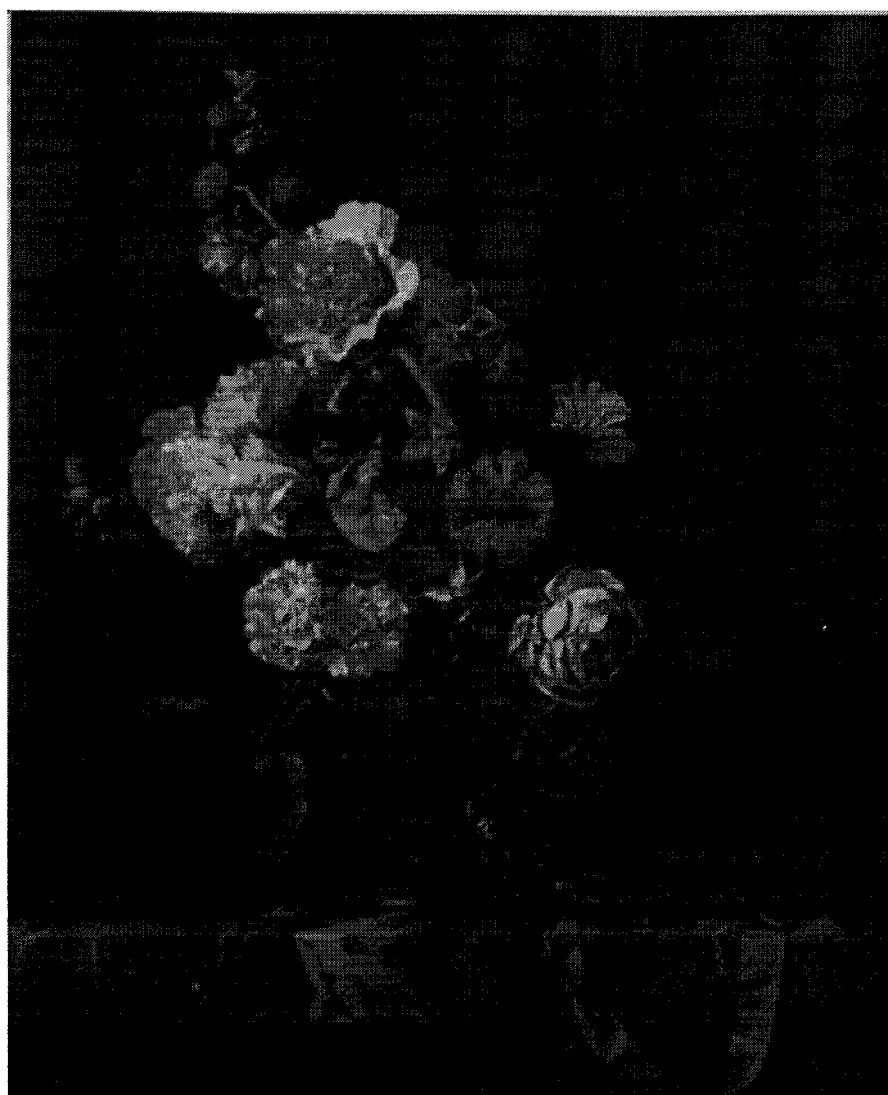


Figure 83: Willem van Aelst, *Vase of Flowers with a Watch*, 1656 Staatliche Kunstsammlung Kassel (55 x 46.3 cm)

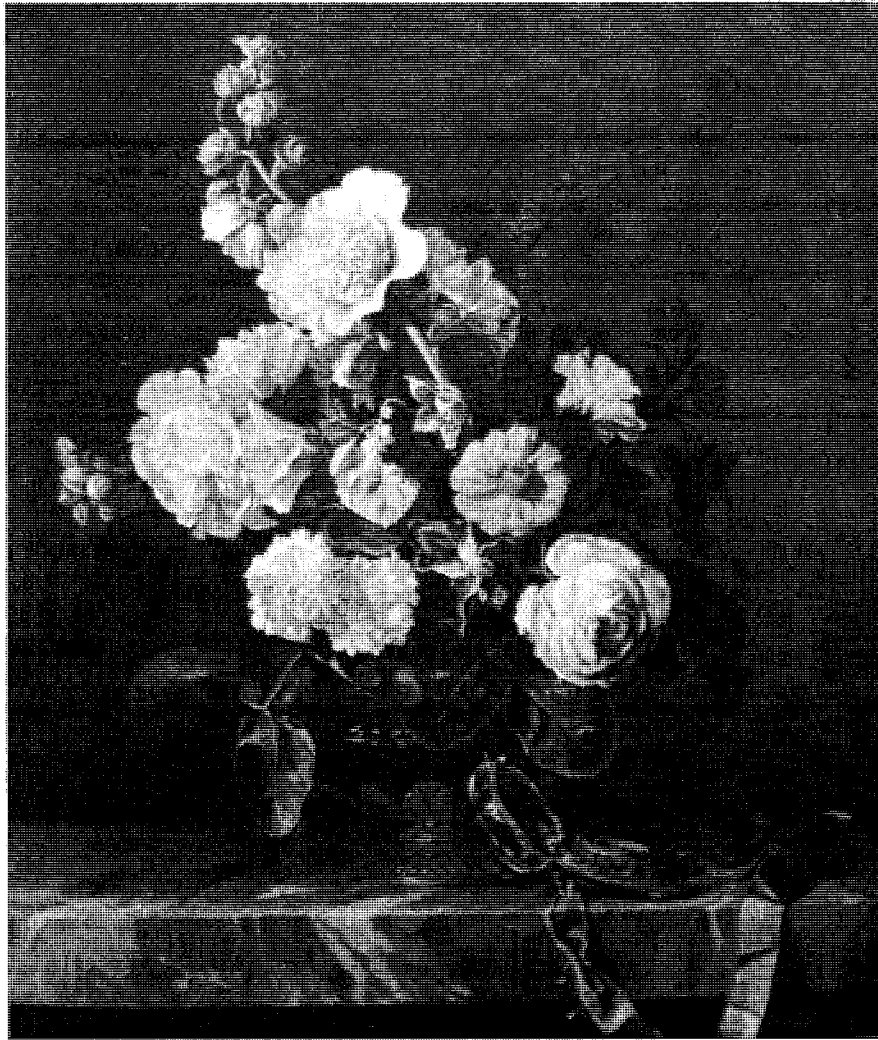


Figure 84: Willem van Aelst, *Vase of Flowers with a Watch*, c. 1656, Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der bildenden Künste, Vienna (55 x 45 cm)

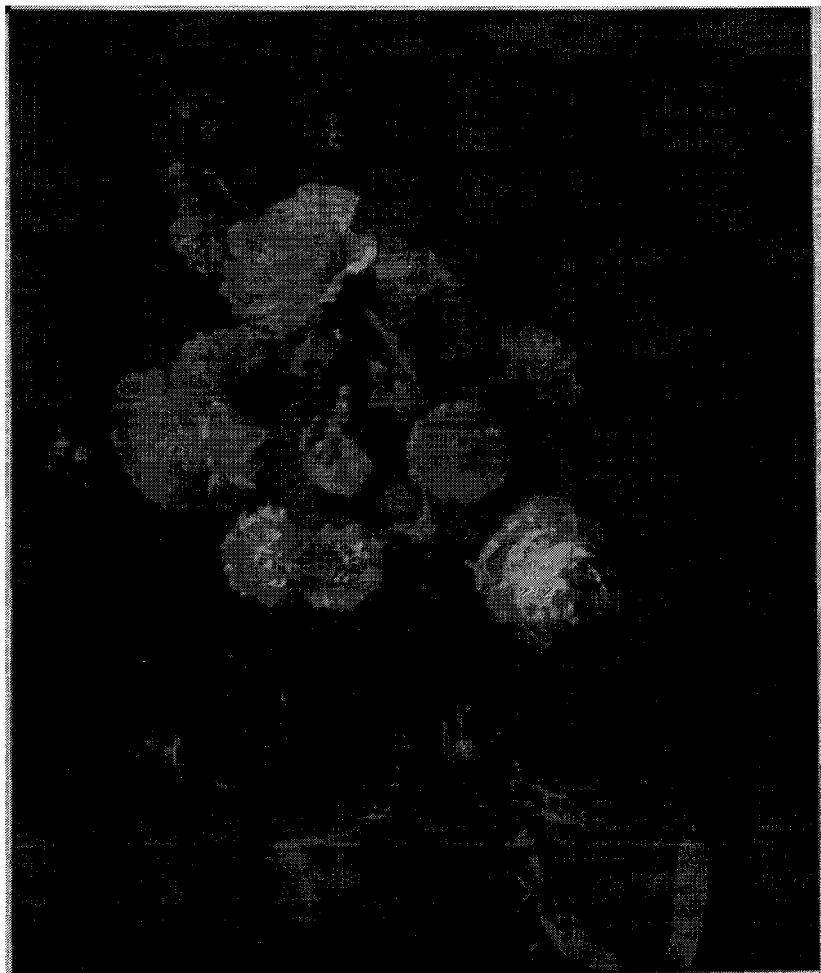


Figure 85: Willem van Aelst, *Flower Still Life*, c. 1656, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh (55 x 45 cm)



Figure 86: Willem van Aelst, *Vase with Flowers*, 1659/60, Michaelis Collection, Cape Town (83.8 x 66.7 cm)



Figure 87: Willem van Aelst, *Hunt Still Life*, 1668, Stedelijk Museum Het Prinsenhof, Delft (65.5 x 53 cm)

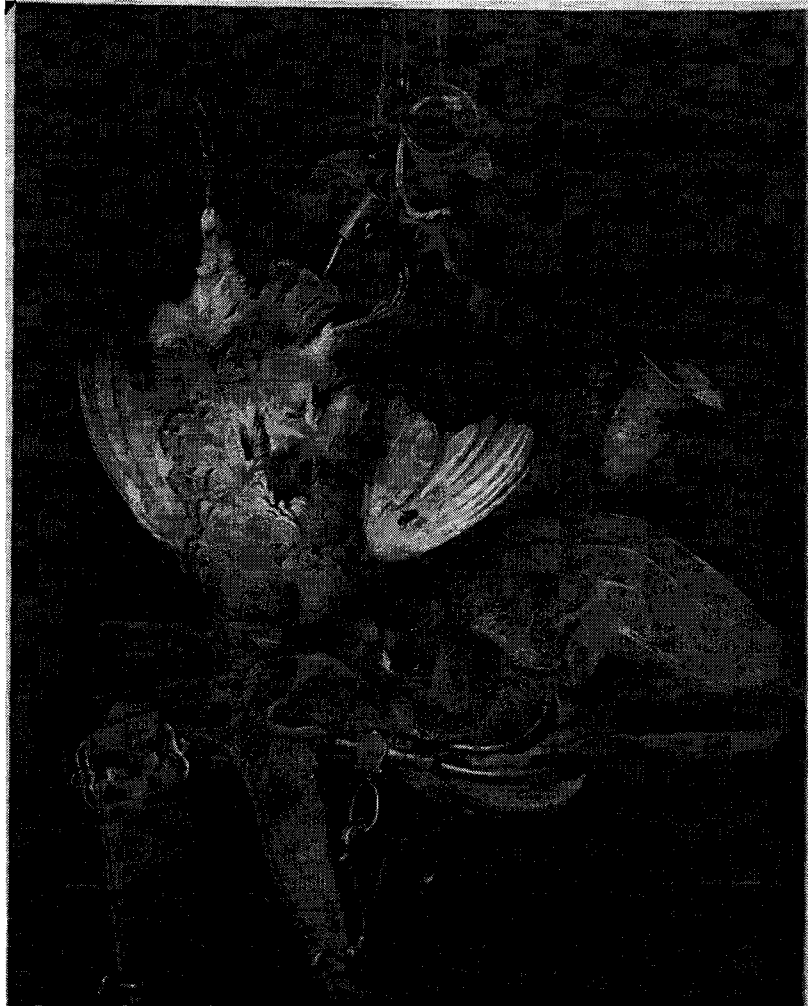


Figure 88: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life with Hunting Equipment*, 1668, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe (68 x 54 cm)



Figure 89: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life with Fruit, Mouse and Butterflies*, 1677, Staatliche Kunstsammlung Kassel (76.7 x 58.3 cm)



Figure 90: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life with Fish, Bread, Onions and Olives with a Nautilus Cup on a Red Silk Cloth on a Stone Table*, 1678, Galerie Sanct Lucas, Vienna (67.7 x 54.6 cm)



Figure 91: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life with Orpheus Zoutvat, Fish, Onions, Bread, Chestnuts and Oysters*, c. 1680, Gallery J. Hoogsteder, The Hague (1983)
(57 x 46 cm)



Figure 92: Adam van Vianen, *Salt Cellar*, 1620 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (26.4 x 14 cm)



Figure 93: Jan van Eyck, *Van der Paele Madonna*, 1436, Bruges, Groeningemuseum

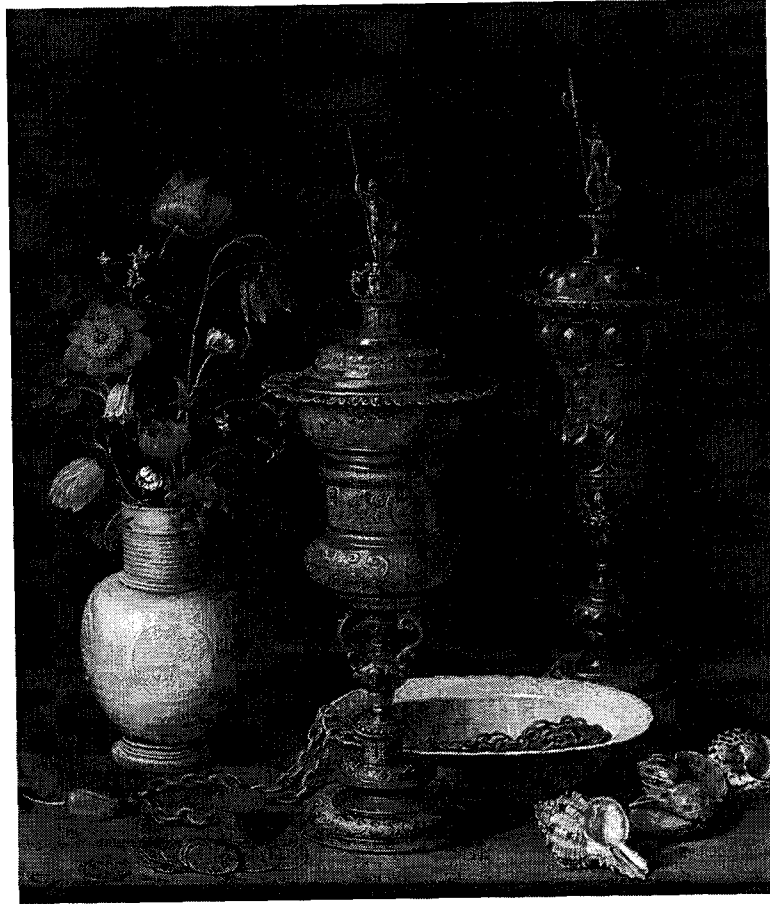


Figure 94: Clara Peeters, *Still Life with Flowers and Goblets*, 1612, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe

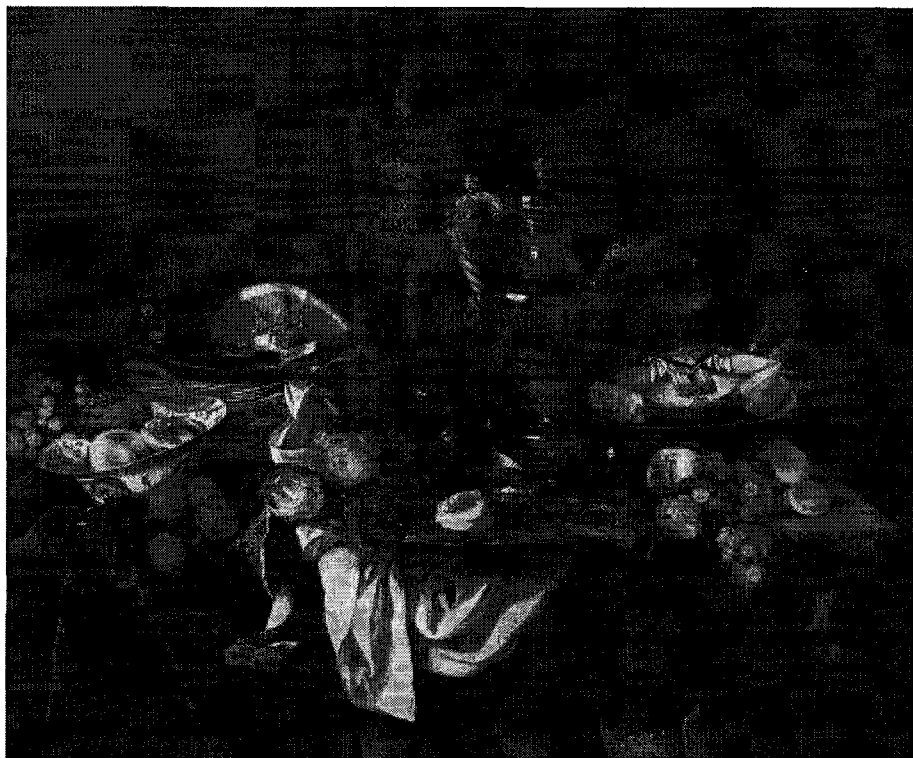


Figure 95: Abraham van Beyeren, *Banquet Still Life*, Mauritshuis, The Hague

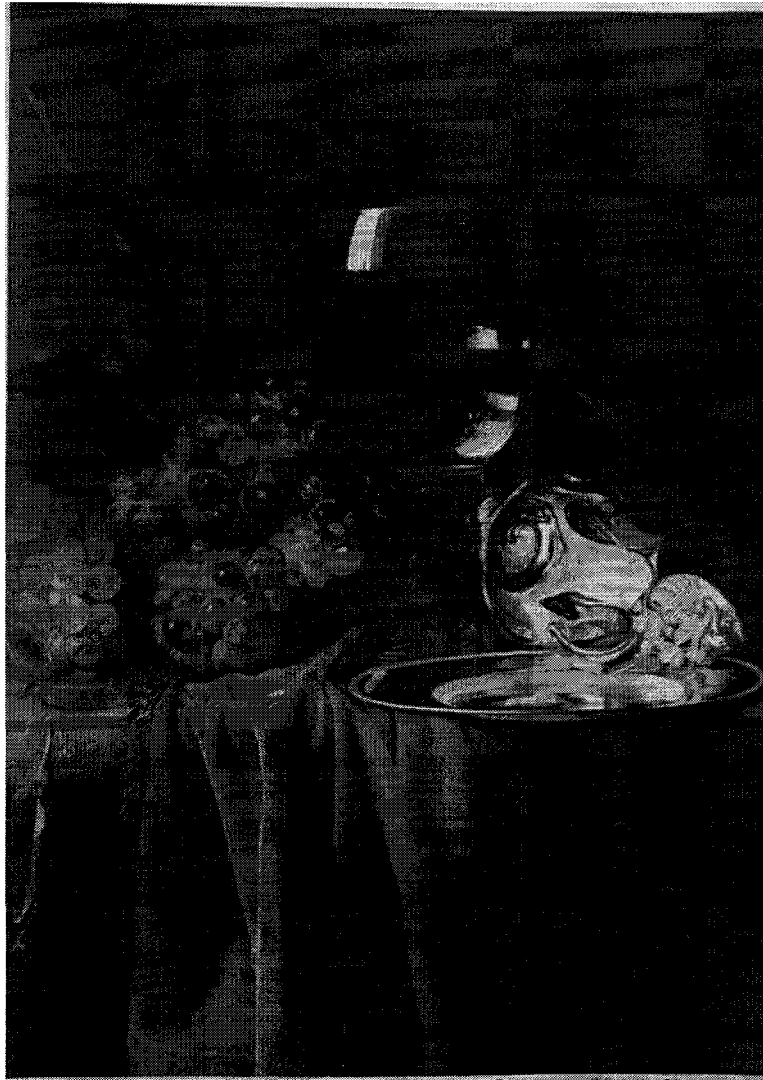


Figure 96: Willem van Aelst, *Still Life of Grapes, a Roemer, a Silver Ewer and a Plate*, 1659, Johnny van Haefen 2002. (70.1 x 45.4 cm)

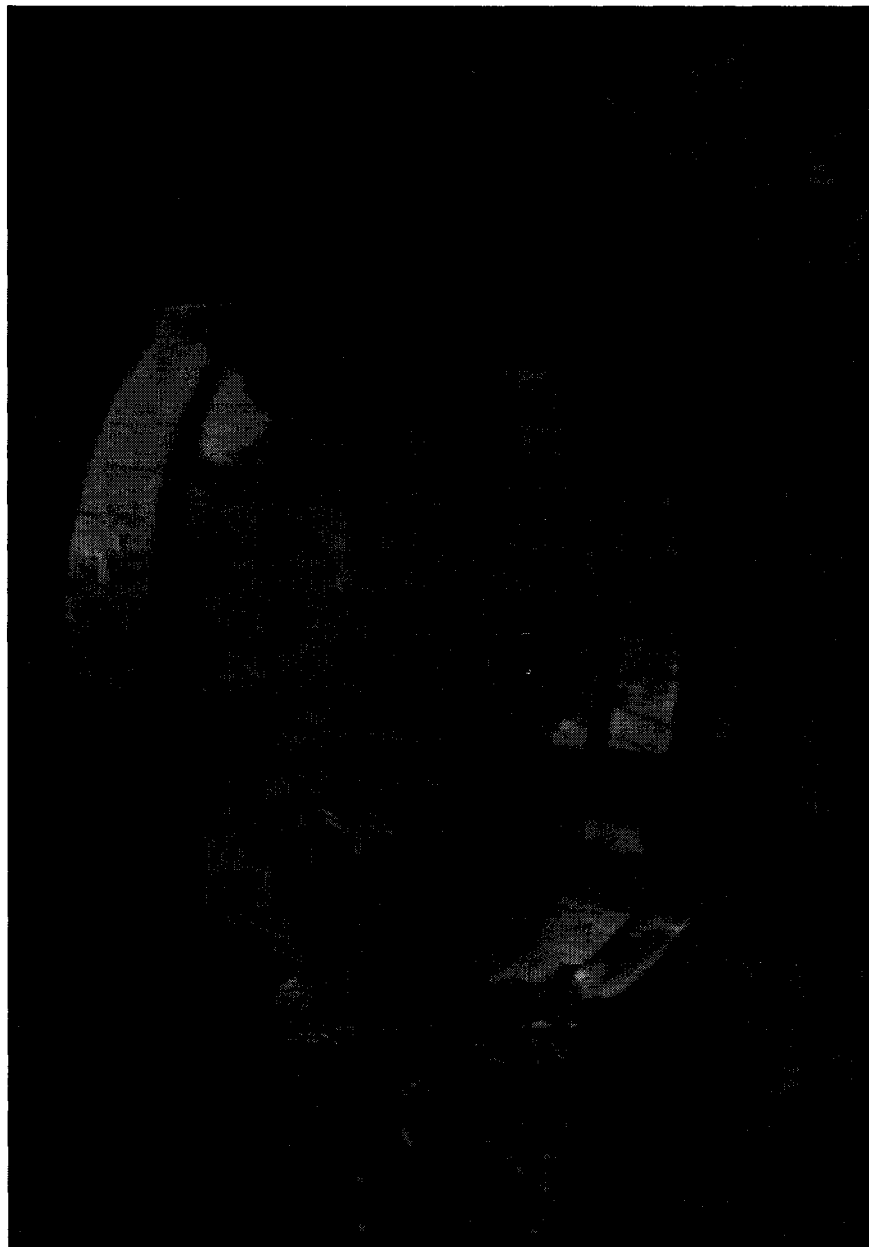


Figure 97: Willem van Aelst, detail *Fruits and a Wineglass*, Koninklijk Museum voor Schoene Kunst, Antwerp

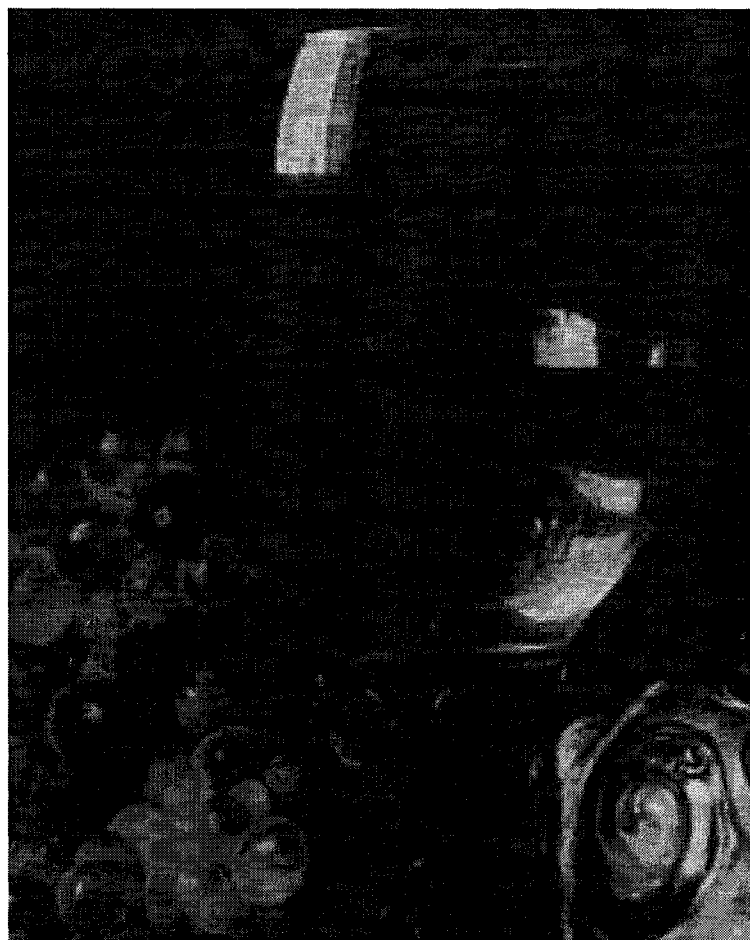


Figure 98: Willem van Aelst, detail *Still Life of Grapes, a Roemer, a Silver Ewer and a Plate*, 1659, Johnny van Haften 2002.



Figure 99: Jan Bruegel the Elder, *Holy Family with a Garland of Flowers*, c. 1620, High Museum of Art, Atlanta

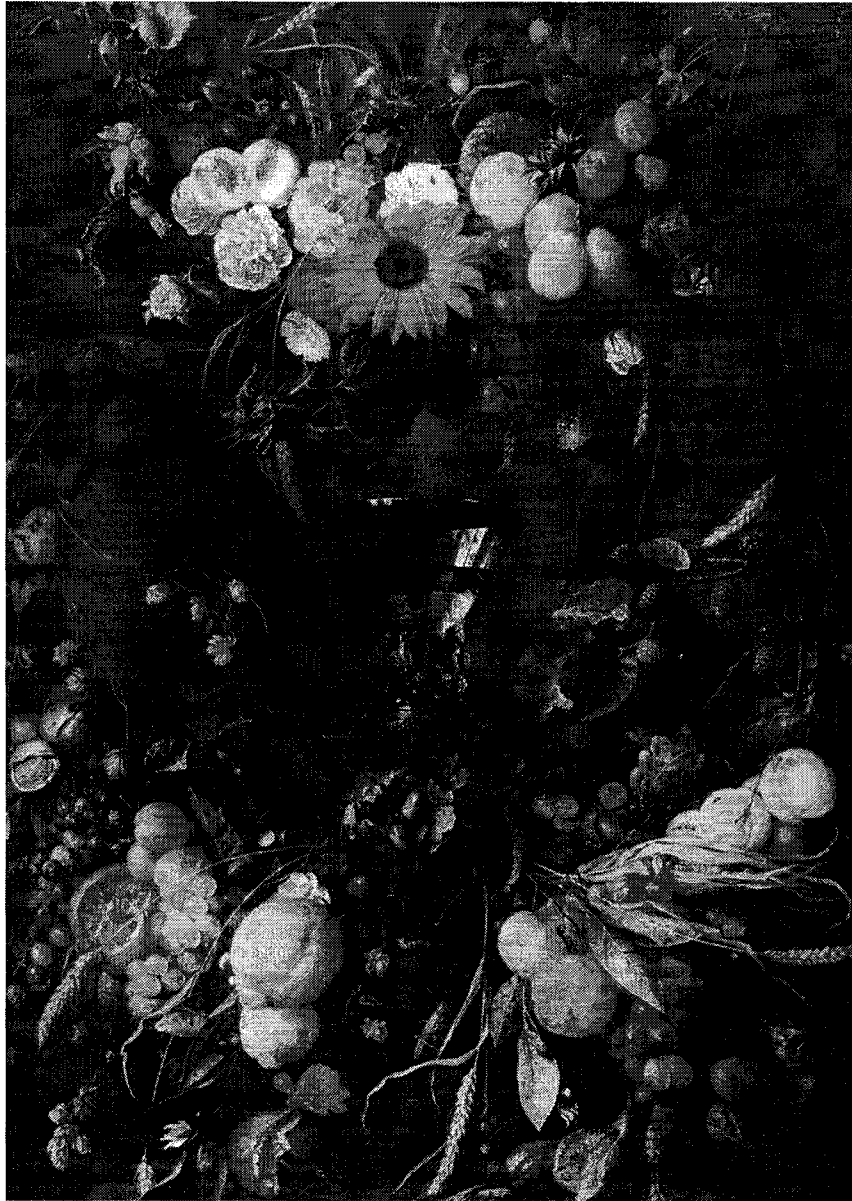


Figure 100: Jan Davidsz de Heem, *Fruit and Flower Still Life*, 1650 Gemäldegalerie, Dresden

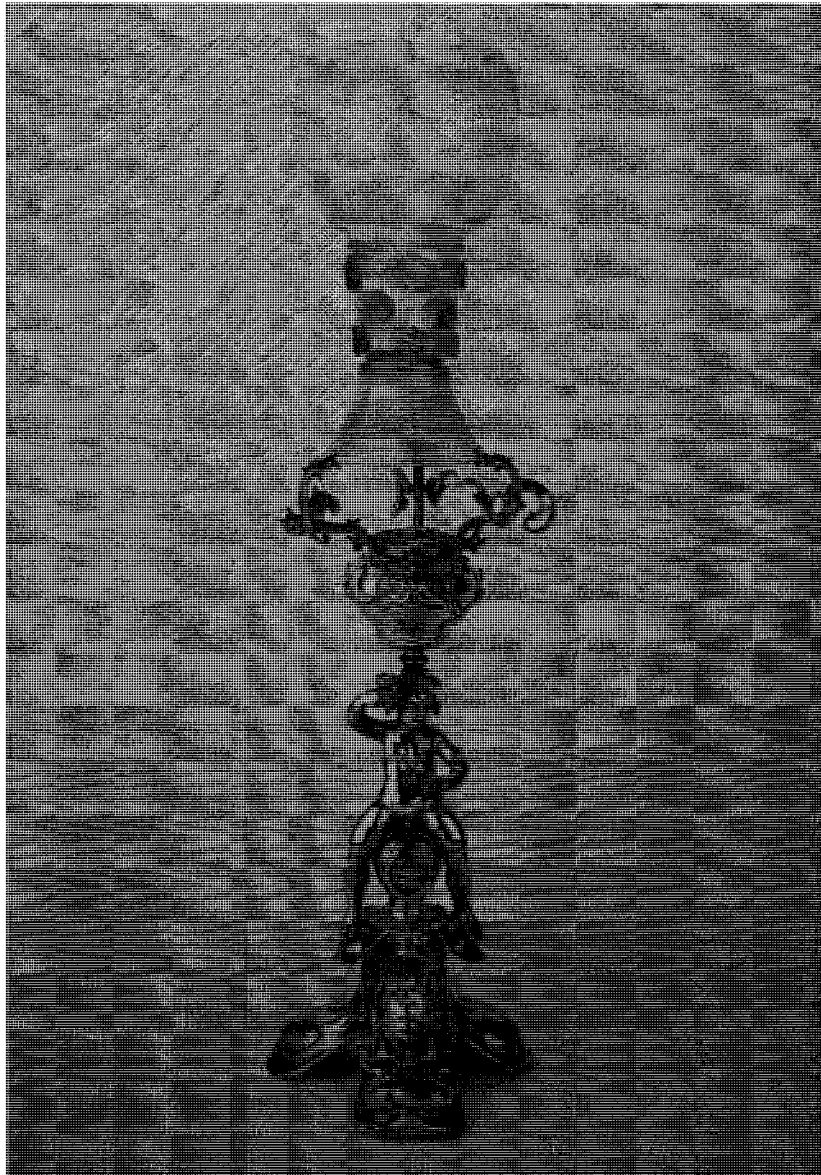


Figure 101: Andries Grill, *Bekerschroef*, 1642 Gemeentemuseum, Den Haag

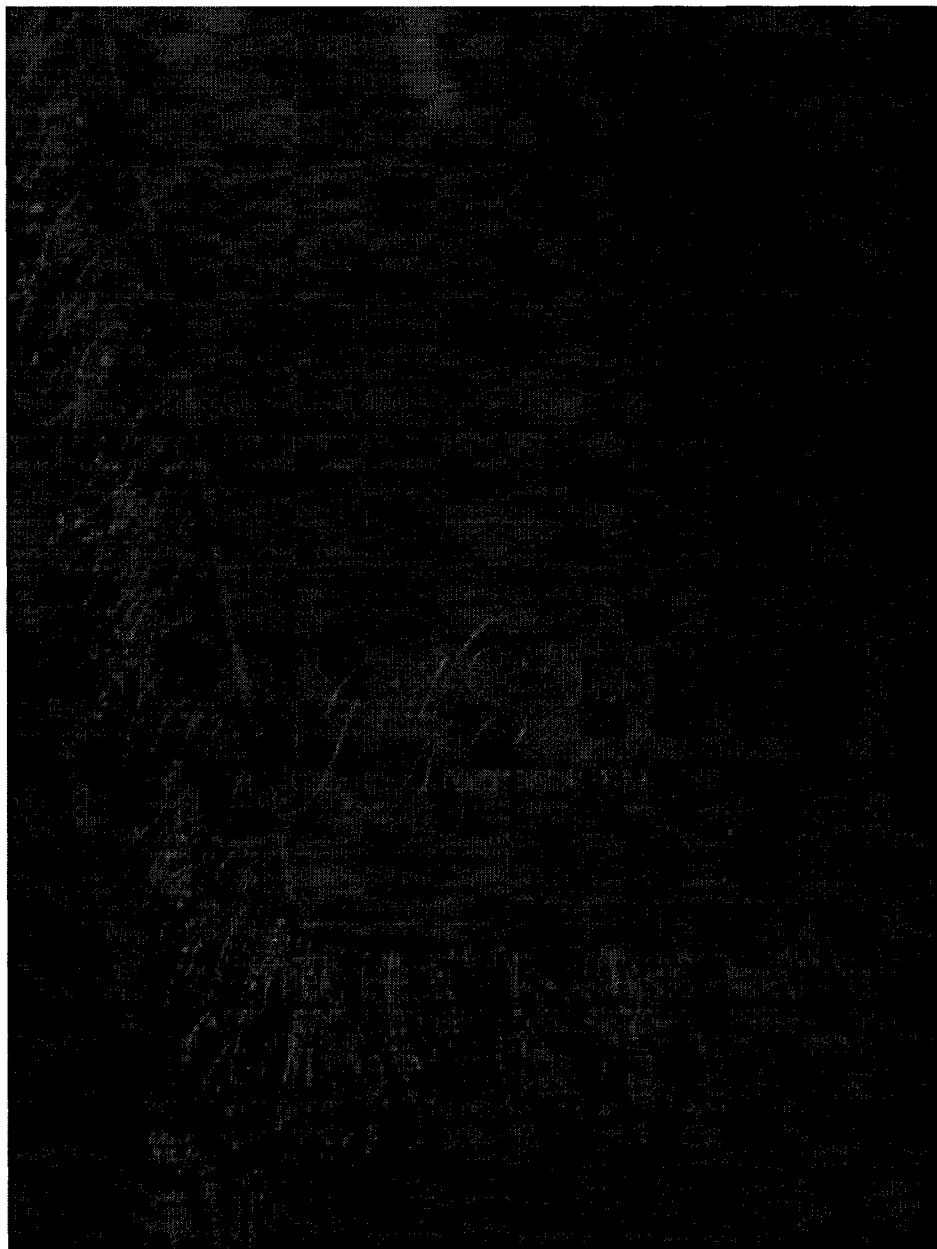


Figure 102: Willem van Aelst, detail *Fruits and a Wineglass*, 1659 Koninklijk Museum voor Schoene Kunst, Antwerp



Figure 103: Jan van Eyck, *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife*, 1434, National Gallery, London



Figure 104: Andrea Mantegna, *St. Mark the Evangelist*, c. 1450 Städel Museum, Frankfurt



Figure 105: Titian, *St. Sebastian* from the Averoldi Altarpiece, 1522, SS. Nazaro e Celso, Brescia

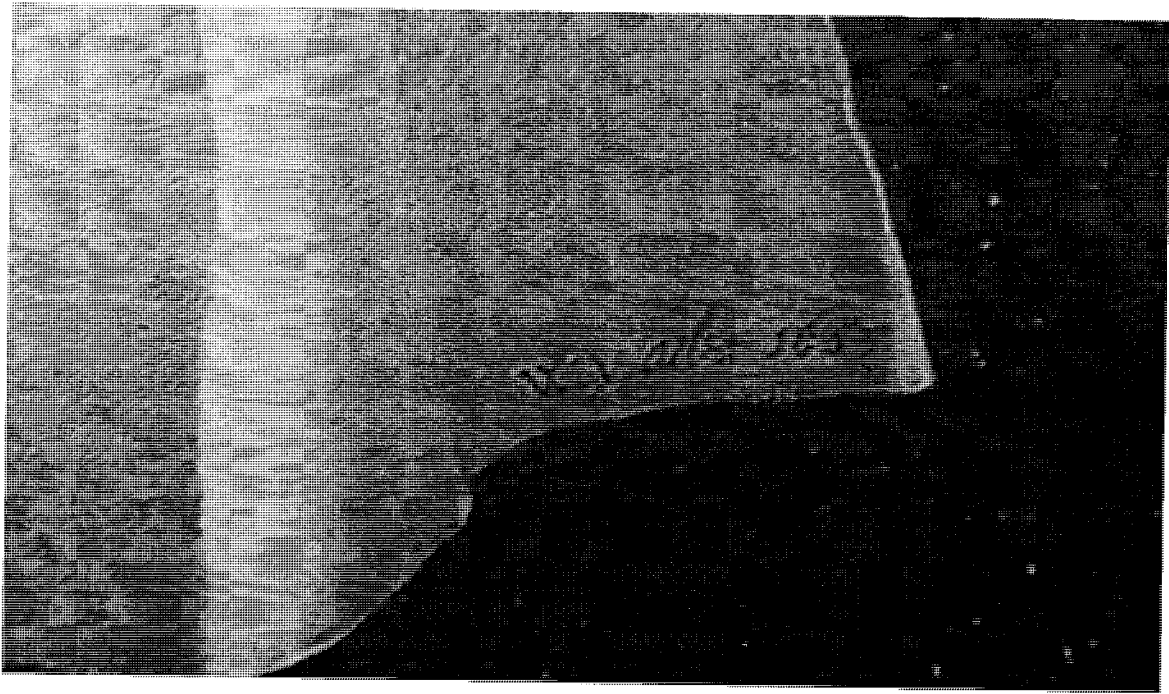


Figure 106: Willem van Aelst, detail from figure 10, *Still Life of Fruit and Precious Objects*, 1653, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, Florence

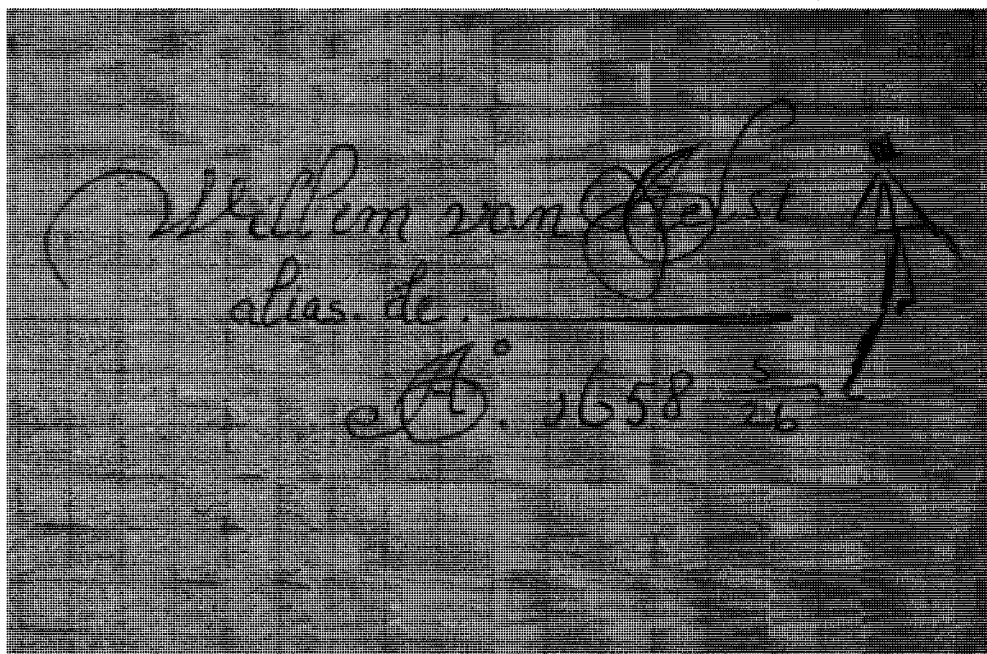


Figure 107: Willem van Aelst, rendering of signature from *Still Life with Birds*, 1658, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

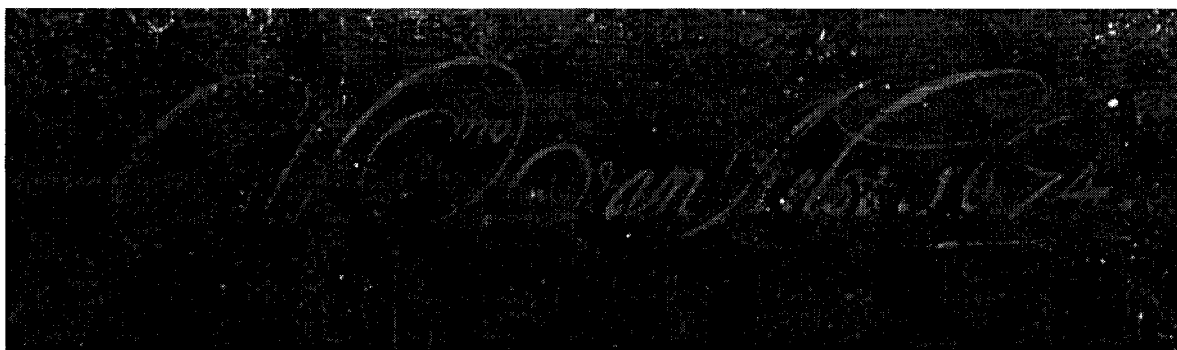
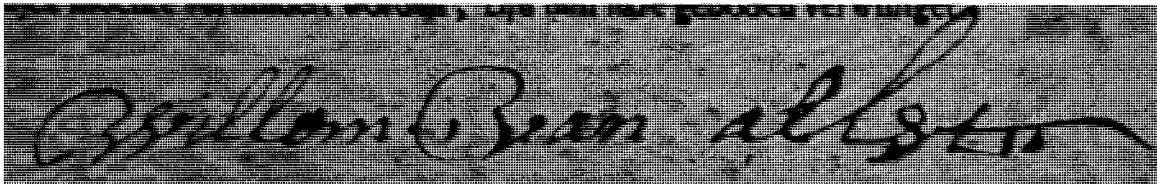
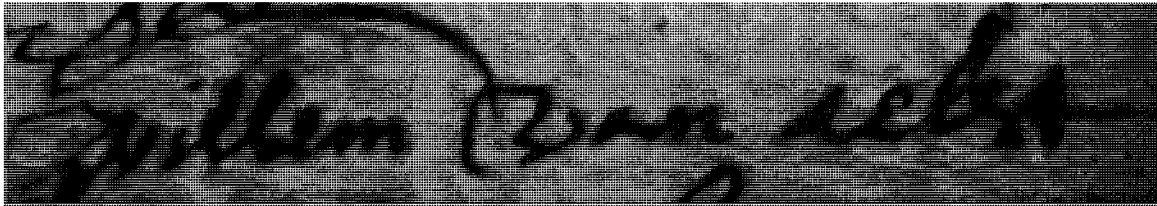


Figure 108: Willem van Aelst, detail of *Still Life with Dead Birds and a Game Bag*, 1674 J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles



Handwritten signature of Willem van Aelst, dated 1679. The signature is written in a cursive script and reads "Willem van Aelst".



Handwritten signature of Willem van Aelst, dated 1672. The signature is written in a cursive script and reads "Willem van Aelst".

Figure 109: Two Willem van Aelst signatures from Notarial documents of 1679 and 1672



Figure 110: Jan van de Velde, Title page *Spiegel der Schrijfkunste*, 1605

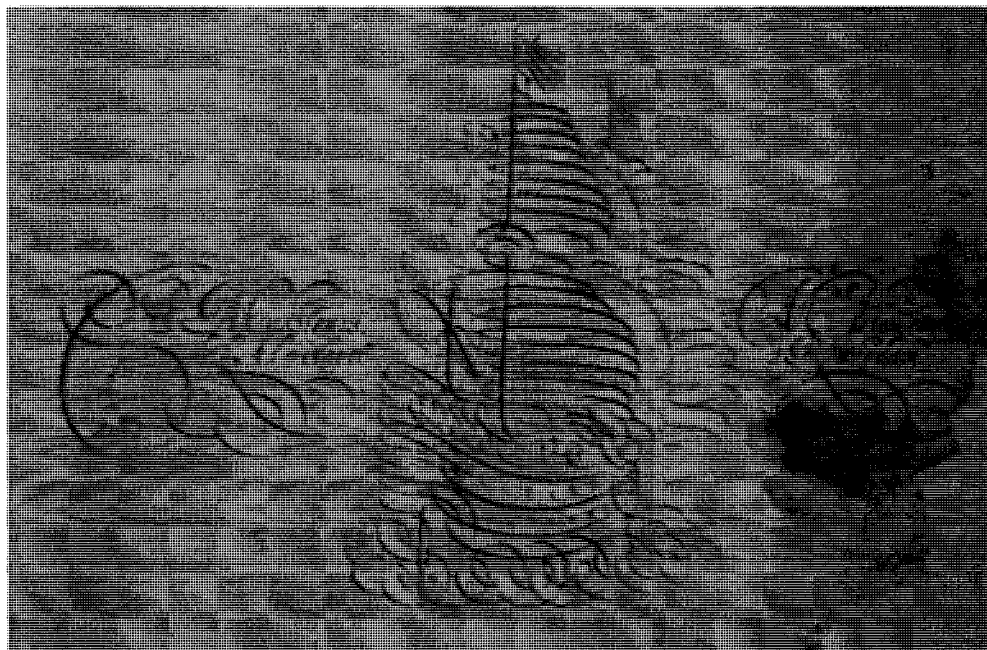


Figure 111: Jan van de Velde, *East-Indiaman*, Page of fine writing from *Spiegel der Schrijfkunste*, 1605



Figure 112: Willem van Aelst, detail of figure 80, *Hunting Still Life*, c. 1665, Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston



Figure 113: Paulus van Vianen, two Views of: *Covered Cup with Episodes from the Story of Diana and Actaeon*, 1610, Coll. H.S.H. Friedrich Wilhelm Fürst zu Wied

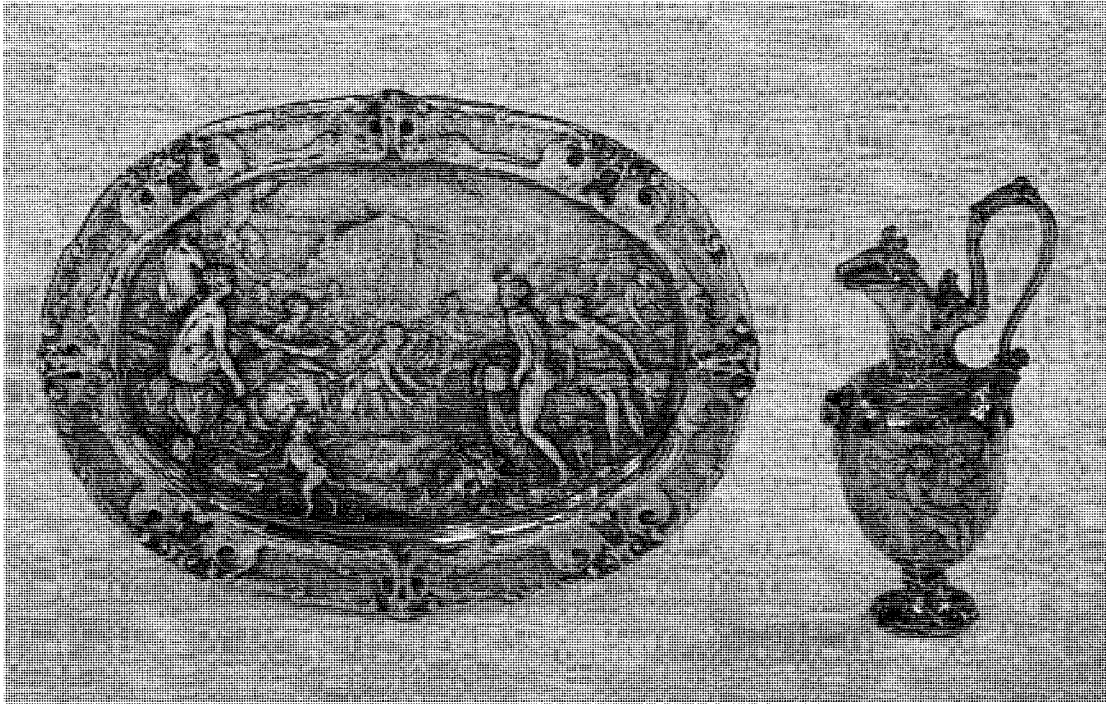


Figure 114: Paulus van Vianen, *Ewer and Basin with Episodes from the stories of Diana and Callisto and Diana and Actaeon*, 1613 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Figure 115: Willem van Aelst, detail *Pronk Still Life with a Jewelry Box*, 1651, Zamek Vizovice, Czech Republic



Figure 116: Jean Warin: obverse *Louis XIV and Anne of Austria*, 1643 The British Museum, London



Figure 117: Abraham van Beyeren, *Fish in a Basket Near a Scale*, 1650's Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection

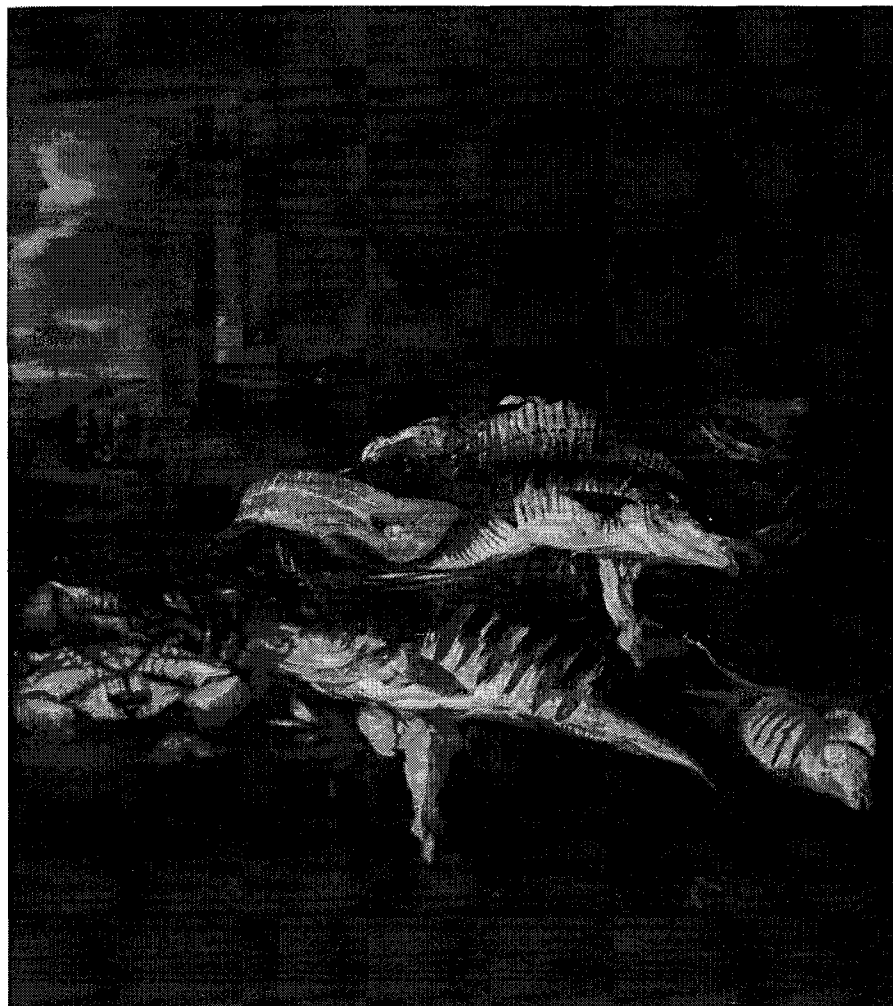


Figure 118: Abraham van Beijeren, *Still Life of Fish in a Interior with a View of the Fish Trade on the Beach*, c. 1660 European Private Collection

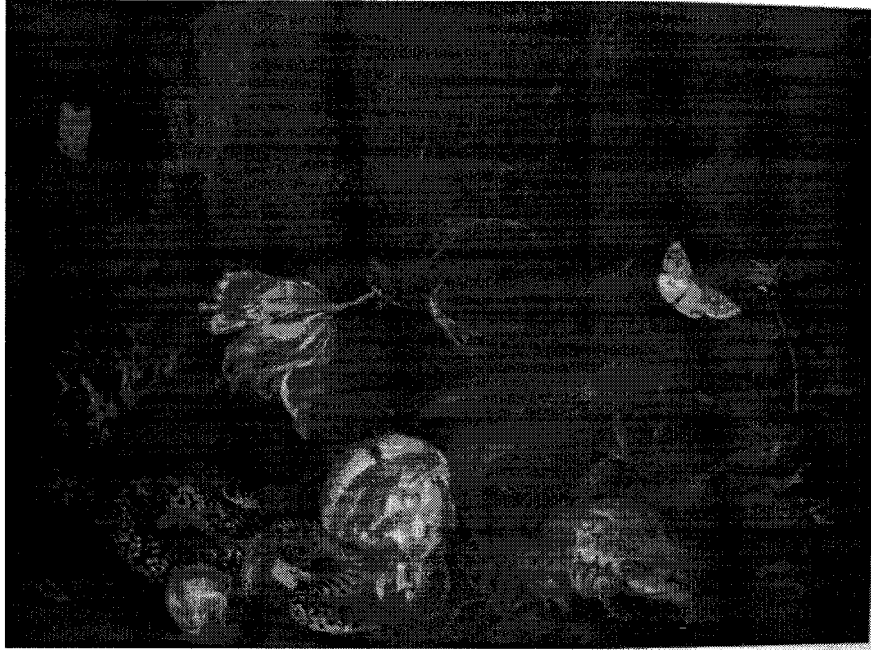


Figure 119: Otto Marseus van Schrieck, *Nature Study*, 1671, Pittsburg, Heinz Collection



Figure 120: Pieter van Aanradt, *Jug, Glass of Beer, and Pipes on a Table*, 1658, Mauritshuis, Den Haag



Figure 121: Jan Davidsz de Heem, *A Richly Laid Table with Parrots*, c. 1655, John and Mable Ringling Museum, Sarasota