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**Winter Cultural Course – Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021**



**Barnsley House** (GL7 5EE), nr. Cirencester, Glos.

**'Dutch Courage: Netherlandish Painting during the Golden Age'**



## Course Content

The Dutch Reformed church and a rising sense of Dutch nationalism informed the Golden Age. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, driven by new freedom from Spanish Catholic rule, the Dutch Republic experienced a surge in economic and cultural prominence. An influx of trade boosted commerce, leading to the rise of a large middle and merchant class in the market for the proliferation of art that had cropped up in response to the burgeoning celebration of Dutch life and identity.

**Landscape painting** exploded during the Dutch Golden Age, bringing with it an emphasis upon the unique characteristics of Dutch landscape features. **Genre painting** experienced a magnificent evolution, with a distinct look at the contemporary lifestyle, trends, and interests of the Dutch people of the time. **The *stilleven*, or still life** surged in popularity, utilised to imaginatively express objects of beauty. This dominant element of Dutch art developed into a number of subtypes, of which floral still life, presented with scientific accuracy, was the most popular.

Some scholars have referred to Dutch Golden Age painting as Dutch Realism.



### Timing for the day:

09:30am Arrival and coffee

10:00am Session 1

11:15am Break and coffee

11:45am Session 2

13:00pm Lunch (provided)

14:00pm Session 3

15:30pm Close



## Teaching structure

### Session 1

#### Introduction

Holland, socio-economic, political, geographical elements in brief

#### Genres and Subjects

The hierarchy of the genres

#### Still Life

Introduction to Still Life: definitions, types, symbolism, vocabulary



### Session 2

#### Still Life

Plentitude: *Drinking Horn, Lobster and Glasses, Kalf*

Vanitas: *The Vanities of Human Life, Steenwyck*

Pronkstilleven: *A Richly Laid Tablecloth with Parrots, de Heem*

Entomology and Caterpillars: *Flowers in a Vase on a ledge with a dragonfly, caterpillar and butterfly, Ruysch*



### Session 3

#### Genre

*The Milkmaid, Vermeer*

*The Art of Painting, Vermeer*

#### Cityscape

*The Courtyard in Delft, de Hooch*

*View of Delft, Vermeer*

#### Landscape

*The Avenue at Middelharnis, Hobbema*

## Contextual information to the period

### The Baroque

c. 1580-1750

### The Dutch Golden Age

1588 to 1672

The Dutch Golden Age was a period in the history of the Netherlands, roughly spanning the era from 1588 to 1672, in which Dutch trade, science, and art and the Dutch military were among the most acclaimed in the world. The first section is characterised by the Eighty Years' War, which ended in 1648.

It was a period of great wealth for the Dutch Republic. The Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC) or Dutch East India Company caused trade to expand quickly, which attracted immigrants and stimulated the growth of the main cities and ports.

### Historical Context

In the 17th century the Dutch had crushed the Spanish navy in the Battle of the Downs and had achieved independence. It was the so-called Golden Age of the Dutch Republic. The Dutch merchants expanded their trade in the East and West Indies making Holland a very wealthy country indeed.

Protestantism was greatly influenced by Calvinism in Holland. While no historical religious paintings were approved for protestant churches it was acceptable to commission paintings containing a moral message. Paintings emphasized the country's wealth while at the same time cautioning against over-indulgence or vanity of any kind which would be seen as unacceptable in the eyes of God.

Dutch painters of this period largely forewent religious subjects in favour of *genre* works — that is, history paintings, portraiture, landscapes, everyday scenes and still life — which tended to sell better with the merchant class. Among this list, landscape art was popular across the art-buying population.

Mercantile, intellectual and artistic talent flourished in the Netherlands, and the Dutch Republic was the wealthiest country in the seventeenth century. By 1648 the Treaty of Munster meant that Spain ceded all claims to territory.

The Dutch imported many national resources, but flax, hops and tobacco were the products of their own lands; livestock too, with milk-making at the fore as a result. They were also skilled mapmakers, navigators and boat-builders, utilising the canal routes of the Rhine for the purposes.

1602 Dutch East India Company led to the export of bricks to the Far East — in return, spices, silks, porcelain became Dutch imports. Success in Haarlem, for example, is found in the imported luxury goods — parrots, Venetian goblets and Turkish carpets represented in Still Life paintings.

## Subjects and Genres

Landscape painting, still life and genre paintings became the most popular subject types or categories in Dutch painting of the Golden Age, thus celebrating daily life yet with a moral conscious. Didactic lessons became part and parcel of both genre and still life paintings, with warnings against sin alongside visual cues to the inevitability of death. The vanitas subgenre focussed on the brevity of life, whilst concurrently warning viewers about the dangers of excess.

Genre painting grew in the Dutch Republic with the destruction and removal of religious imagery from churches converted to Protestant use, which forced artists to turn to other subjects for private clients.

## Still-Life (Subjects & Genres) An introduction

- Hierarchy of genres, considered lowly, possibly at the bottom of the ladder
- 'The Cinderella of subject matter' – always left behind
- Originally, due to its low status, S-Ls featured only as subsidiary elements
- Zenith or heyday, 17<sup>th</sup> c Holland, Spain, 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> c France etc.
- Definitions / terms: *Stilleven*, *Nature Morte*, *Bodegones*
- Inanimate objects
- *Vanitas* theme, *Memento Mori*

## Function

- Senses: smell, touch, sound, taste, sight
- Wealth, status, merchants
- Trade, commerce, imports, travel
- The home and personal possessions, cultured, learning (humanism)
- Aristocratic image of country life, 'hunting trophies'
- Time – death (mortality), life, rebirth, birth, seasons, *tempus fugit*
- Didactic, moralising, vanity of life – Ecclesiastes 'To every thing there is a season'
- Allegory, symbolism, iconography
- Warning, broken string, discord, portent, disharmony
- Seven deadly sins, virtues, vices
- Show of technical virtuosity, bravura, adeptness, illusionism, veristic, trompe l'oeil (Apelles, Xeusion)
- Enjoyment, pleasure, indulgence, opulence, decadence, hedonism

## Function and purpose

Still life (from *Stilleven*, Dutch) was considered a lowly subject within the hierarchy of genres up until it reached a zenith in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to that, still-lives were merely subsidiary components of other genre paintings, such as portraits. Also known as *Nature Morte*, still lifes often feature inanimate objects. Prevalent in 17<sup>th</sup> century Holland in particular was the *vanitas* theme, or *memento mori*. This connects with the concept that '*tempus fugit*' (time flies) i.e. from Ecclesiastes 'To every thing there is a season.'

The work entitled '*The Vanities of Human Life*' of 1645 by Jan Steenwyck, features key allegory, symbolism and iconography as a reminder of the transience of life.

### **Dutch & Flemish Still Life c.1560–1650**

- Still Lifes remind the viewer of moral issues such as temperance and worldly vanity.
- Often images of plenitude, with encoded Protestant moral codes, in the Dutch republic.
- Dutch still-life paintings are a genre which grew out of a prospering and an ever-fluctuating trade industry and economy.
- 'Abundance' may be interpreted as abundance of nature (e.g. game, fruit, laid tables, kitchen scenes) and / or human wealth and power. The word may prompt other thoughts: abundance of painterly skill.
- Prosperity and patriotism were expressed through many Flemish still lifes; presenting the paradox of earthly abundance being both celebrated and shown to be transient.
- Dutch 17th Century still lifes point to historical events, such as Kalf's Still Life with Nautilus Cup. The 'foreign' objects are products of colonisation, power and European domination.

### **Vanitas**

- Moralising and didactic still lifes warned of the dangers of worldly goods.
- Many examples show clocks or watches, oil lamps and candles.
- Claesz, Still Life with the Spinario (1628) shows how musical instruments reflect the transient nature of time and the ephemerality of music. This painting also acts to remind the viewer that painting is hard work which is worth it.
- Steenwyck uses metaphors and symbols, and the meanings that may be construed from particular arrangements of objects.
- The use of objects to symbolise the brevity of human life and the transience of earthly pleasures.
- Objects may be interpreted with reference to their symbolic significance, and place this in a wider social and cultural context – for example, the close relation between the contemplation of death and contemporary Christian thinking and practice.
- Many still lifes refer to the idea of 'vanitas', which is a lament on the transience of all things. The theme is frequently symbolised by objects such as skulls or clocks.
- Pieter Claesz' Vanitas Still Life (1630) features objects such as an overturned glass or an extinguished candle. In this example the idea of the value of knowledge is also symbolised by an old book showing its futility in the face of eternity.

### **Breakfast Pieces**

- The Dutch term for breakfast is *ontbijt*.
- Display of simple foodstuffs, less ostentatious than banquet pieces.
- Commissioned by patrons who wanted luxury items yet also admired simplicity and austerity: Willem Claesz Heda, Breakfast with a Crab 1648.
- Exquisite table arrangements and breakfasts became a popular theme in Haarlem still life painting.
- Pieter Claesz also did breakfast pieces and perfected the genre as a sub-division of Still Life as a genre. Still Life with Fish (1647) shows a glass Romer. These glasses were produced in large numbers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Holland and Germany.
- The style developed out of late medieval glass forms and continued into the nineteenth century. The colours are subdued but once again the lemon stands out as does the salt cellar. The bread and the fish suggest Biblical references.

- In all examples it is important to consider who they were done for (wealthy patrons and buyers) who wanted to see luxury and yet simplicity and taste. Note the hunks of bread and white tablecloths (altar pall).

### Flower Paintings

- The Dutch term is *Pronkstilleven*.
- Flower Paintings can be read in terms of Christian iconography (Jan Davidsz de Heem, Eucharist in Fruit Wreath 1648, the medicinal and spiritual properties of flowers (Ludger Tom Ring, Vases of Flowers 1652, as emblems of colonialism and abundance, displays of virtuoso technical skill and as purely formal aesthetic creations.
- The motif of the flower in a vase can be seen in early Dutch scenes of the Annunciation. The flower at that stage had symbolic and iconographic connotations (Memling's Vase of Flowers (1480).
- Religious still lifes of flowers and fruit were first developed by Seghers.
- Floral Wreath with Madonna and Child (undated) or Jan Davidsz de Heem Eucharist in Fruit Wreath (1648).
- Flowers were seen to have medicinal properties and became associated with issues of healing and spirituality. e.g Vases of Flowers Ludger tom Ring, 1562.
- Carel van Mander and Lodewijck van den Bosch were said to be the first to paint pure Flower Still life paintings for purely aesthetic and decorative purposes but none of the latter's works remain.
- Bosschaert started a dynasty of flower painting: Flower Vase in a window niche (c. 1620).
- Horticulturalism, a contemporary interest in botany and the values of material ownership, leading also to 'tulip mania'.
- Rise of science.
- Dutch flower painting became popular at the turn of the 17 century with the tulip trade but although their aesthetic value was esteemed, these still lifes were bought for their commercial value.
- Still lifes decorated houses and were frequently hung over doorways. Backdrop of the *xenia*.

### Abundance

- Rise in urban living during the century led to more emphasis on material goods.
- Examples include floral pieces and breakfast pieces, imported goods such as tableware to show dominion over the seas, e.g. works by Kalf. *Luxus* for abundance in mealtimes – cornucopia idea.
- Dutch culture of the seventeenth century regarded orderliness as vital and as a female prerogative.
- Disorderly tables appear with masculine attributes such as watches and documents, tobacco, pipes etc. as if to suggest the calm has gone.
- In examples such as Kalf's Still Life with Nautilus Cup (1662) the 'foreign' objects are products of colonisation, power and European domination.
- Dutch seventeenth-century still lifes not only depict the times but also tell us something about the target market. For example, fish still lifes were usually painted at The Hague whereas the affluent citizens of Haarlem preferred more refined breakfast still lifes, such as Peter Claesz Still Life (1633).



- Jan van Huysum's Fruit Still Life (c.1700) reflects the growth of agriculture from the sixteenth century promoted through botanical sciences, which had an impact on fruit and vegetable farming.
- Depictions of markets, kitchens and pantries show fruit and vegetables piled up in baskets or bulging over the edge of a plate.
- Fruit became one of the last courses in a meal, particularly amongst the landed gentry and the merchant classes, who valued refined fruits as opposed to wild fruits from the woods.

### **Banquet Pieces**

- The banquet piece, with lavish arrays of food became an expression of national abundance, often including materials and foodstuffs from abroad.
- e.g. Willem Claesz Heda, Banquet Piece with Mince Pie 1635.

### **Game etc.**

- Game and fruit pieces embodied in the work of Willem van Aelst, such as Still Life with Dead Game 1661. Think in literal terms of 'dead nature.'
- These game pieces could be interpreted as signifying man's dominance (lordship) over the natural world
- Seen as advertisements for the wealth of patrons and examples of particular taste.
- Part of the male prerogative – patriarchy and aristocratic tastes; merchant Patrician classes
- Hunting as an aristocratic privilege – royalty and nobility: power of blood sports.
- Wealth and status associated with land ownership.
- Poultry / birds links to shooting from the sky, hence 'air' as one of the four elements – such birds as swans, eagles may have further individual significance

### **Entomology**

- Indicative of the rise of scientific study of plants and wildlife; the interests of the bourgeois collector in precious objects; under the ban on religious images, transposition of artistic effort to secular subjects.
- Symbolology / iconography: metamorphosis, transformation, birth, rebirth.

### **In summary: why still life?**

- Still Life functions as a direct means of representation of, and comment on, a social system – from images of plenitude, with encoded Protestant moral codes, in the Dutch republic to the imagery of commercialisation in twentieth century Pop Art.
- In some respects, a set of objects can represent a set of values at a set time; thus, as a genre, SL reflects the given *zeitgeist* well.
- Still Life speaks directly to the senses, evoking taste, smell and even sound with the presence of musical instruments.
- From ancient times to the present, viewers have delighted in illusionism. This is something Still Life has supplied from the trompe l'oeil of the seventeenth century to hyper-realist art in modern times.



- Still Life is anchored both in the classical (with its origins in ancient xenia) and the Christian traditions, making it a natural point of reference for Western currents of thought.

### Themes

- Reflection of society (wealth, piety) = *zeitgeist*; prosperity, fecundity
- Illusion – mimetic capabilities (trompe l’oeil realism) = veristic, palpable precision
- Senses
- Elements
- Symbolism, allegory (iconography) semiotics, hermeneutics
- Nature and time (*tempus fugit*)
- Life & death (vanitas, *memento mori*)
- Music and literature

### Categories

- Rhopography
- Kitchen scenes (bodegas)
- Religious themes (pantheistic)
- Vanitas

### Associated vocabulary (Still Life)

	A	B
1	<b>TERM</b>	<b>Definition</b>
2	<b>Adombrare</b>	Shadow cast by an object
3	<b>Assemblage</b>	Art made by assembling disparate elements – often everyday objects
4	<b>Bodegones</b>	Still life painting depicting pantry items (Sp.)
5	<b>Cantatero</b>	Larder or cooling space in a niche
6	<b>Comestible</b>	Item of food
7	<b>Kunstkammern</b>	Cabinets of curiosities and forerunners of the modern museum - collections of natural objects
8	<b>Luxus</b>	Ideas of excess: over-indulgence
9	<b>Memento mori</b>	Reminder of death or the transience of life
10	<b>Ontbijtjes</b>	Dutch term for paintings of Laid Tables. Can include both 'Breakfast' and 'Banquet' scenes
11	<b>Opsonia</b>	Provisions or foodstuffs
12	<b>Pronkstilleven</b>	Ornate still life paintings (Dutch)
13	<b>Rhopography</b>	Insignificant or trivial items in still life paintings
14	<b>Rhyparography</b>	The painting of still-life, esp of sordid or unpleasant subjects
15	<b>Tempus fugit</b>	Time flies - reminder of the brevity of life (Latin)
16	<b>Trompe L'oeil</b>	(Fr.) Realistic imagery so as to deceive or trick the eye
17	<b>Tulipomania</b>	'Tulip fever' that gripped the Netherlands in the early 17th c. Speculation led to astronomic price inflation and eventually, economic collapse
18	<b>Vanitas</b>	Still life which includes various symbolic objects designed to remind the viewer of their mortality and of the worthlessness of worldly goods and pleasures
19	<b>Verisimilitude</b>	Extreme realism and meticulous attention to detail
20	<b>Xenia</b>	Latin 'guest-friendship' a still life painting in antiquity offered to guests by host - often contains endemic produce to connote the fecundity of land
21		
22		

## Associated reading

### The Dutch Golden Age

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### Vermeer

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### The Genres

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- Clark, K., *Landscape into Art*
- Jordon, W. B., (ed.), *A Prosperous Past. The sumptuous Still Life in the Netherlands 1600–1700*. The Hague 1988, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth; Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University; Stedelijk Museum, Delft
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