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Authenticity and Authorship

Since the medieval period artists and painters had been craftsmen, whose paintings were produced in workshops which were organized predominantly through shared labour. From the sixteenth century some craftsmen succeeded in finding recognition as individual artists and in freeing themselves from their commitments to the craftsmen's guild, when they were specially employed at court. Yet this new demand affected the capacity of the workshop and the volume of production and sales more than it changed the ways of producing and delegating particular works to specialists. On the contrary, only when the master could delegate less important or routine work to a workshop, was he able to focus on the more challenging task (pl.2).¹

Until the late eighteenth century, sometimes even in the nineteenth century, it was standard practice to have the workshop to produce the entire painting or at least parts of it. In the nineteenth century for example, painters teaching at academies regularly employed their talented students in the execution of large canvases.

A large section of the existing monographs on history painters ask the wrong question when discussing the attributions: Rembrandt, Rubens, Jan Breughel, Jan Davidsz. de Heem or pupil, follower, circle etc.? The more appropriate question would be: who - based on signature or documents - received the commission or possibly sold the painting? Equally important for research

is the question: when during the process of making the painting did the master actively intervene and to what extent and at which stage did he participate in the whole execution? In the historical documents it is clearly and specifically mentioned when a master executed a work entirely by himself. This is the case, for example, with Jan van Huysum. It should be noted that one expects the master to be the sole executor when it came to preparatory designs and drawings (bozzetti) or colored modelli. These patterns were made normally by the master, which the assistants in the workshop had to copy for their daily use. One has to separate the workshop patterns from master patterns like the ones by Georg Flegel (pl.1).²



Pl.1 Georg Flegel, *Mouse and Nuts*
Watercolor on paper
signed with a monogram and dated 1627
formerly Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin



Pl.2 Jan Breughel the Elder and Workshop

- 1) Jan Breughel the Elder, *Workshop with Several Painters, Two Men Grinding Pigments and Two Apprentices*, detail from a painting alluding to *Pictura*, oil on copper 47 x 75 cm, not signed, datable to ca. 1620, private collection, courtesy of Johnny van Haefen, London

It is very unlikely that the master seated with his back turned towards the beholder is identical to the painter of this picture. One should be cautious in attributing any painting of acceptable quality to Jan Breughel the Younger. In this case it is possible the Jan Breughel the Elder was responsible for it and to a certain extent may even have participated in its execution.

compare: Schwartz (1993) pp.66 ff.

- 2) compare: Wettengl (1994) p.170



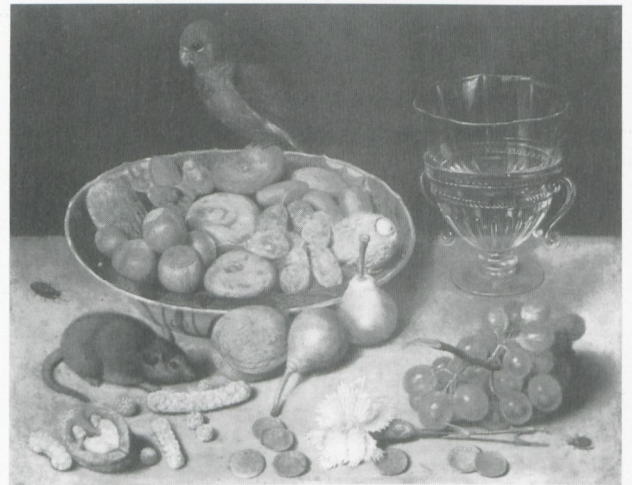
Pl.3 Georg Flegel, *Still Life with Mouse and Nuts*
panel 17,5 x 23 cm
Private Collection



Pl.4 Georg Flegel and workshop, *Still Life with Mouse*
panel 17,5 x 22,5 cm
Private Collection

Other watercolors are still kept at the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin. These preparatory drawings had been used as patterns for oil paintings in the workshop of Flegel (pl.3 / pl.6).³

Even if one accepts the Munich painting as the prime version, it becomes evident that for the repeated use of the same elements in the paintings by Flegel and his workshop, a considerable depot of patterns must have been at their disposal. The documents do not mention these patterns, because the use of them was self-evident and this is also valid for Germany and the Netherlands (pl.7/8).⁴ Noteworthy is a document conveying the destruction of these patterns (as happened in the workshop of the well-established painter of horses, Philips Wouverman)⁵ to prevent anyone outside the workshop to make use of them.



Pl.5 Georg Flegel, *Still Life with Mouse, Parrot, Grapes and a Glass of Wine à Façon-de-Venise*
panel 22 x 28 cm, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlung, Alte Pinakothek, Munich

3) Pl. 3, Provenance: Plantin-Moretus, Antwerp; exhibited in Frankfurt 1994, cat.no. 25
Pl. 4, Provenance: Private Collection, Stuttgart; exhibited in Prague 1994, cat.no. 16-I
Pl. 5, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlung, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, inv.no. 5026



Pl. 7 Jan Davidsz. de Heem, (detail) *Still Life with Fruit and Glasses*, panel 34,2 x 51,7 cm, signed and dated 1652, Private Collection



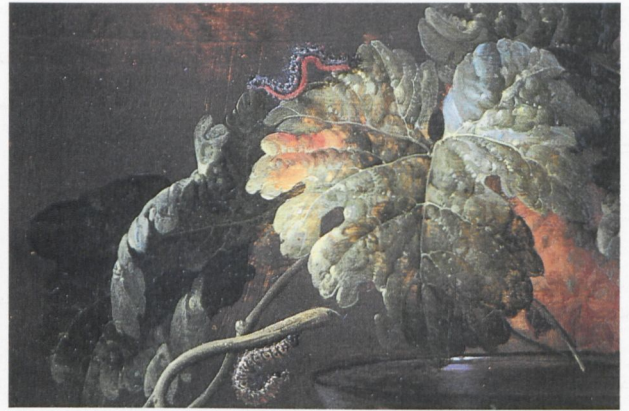
Pl. 8 Jan Davidsz. de Heem, (detail) *Still Life with Glasses*, panel 50 x 46 cm, signed and not dated Private Collection

- 4) The execution of this painting (pl. 7) shows a masterly hand in the perspective and the chromatic scaling of the light. The sovereign handling of these techniques indicates that it might have been the pattern for the other painting (pl.8) One might even have to consider another hitherto unknown painting which functioned as a transmitter from one state (pl.7) to another (pl.8).
- 5) Schumacher (1992) unpublished

Closely related to these patterns - and similar technically - are studies for botanical and zoological purposes executed minutely and precisely in various techniques, like watercolor and gouache, by virtuoso artists ranging from Georg and Jacob Hoefnagel to Maria Sybilla Merian, from Jacopo Ligozzi to Giovanni Garzoni, from Nicolas Robert over Geraert van Spaendonck to Redouté. This highly specialized artistic activity does not permit anyone but the precise observer. In fact it was the masterly versatility of their minutely executed drawings which made these artists sought after by demanding collectors (like the French Kings with the desire to expand their "Recueil des Velins").

One encounters the same phenomenon with artists like Soreau, Hulsdonck, Jan Breughel, Osias Beert, Jan Davidsz. de Heem (pl.9 / pl.10)⁶ and Abraham Mignon. It is probable that these artists had a large quantity of variety of patterns at their disposal. In those days the actual material of oil paintings was costly. Therefore it is likely that these artists kept drawings, watercolors, gouaches and prints to serve as models for further paintings, to copy completely, in part or as a variant.

One is able to reconstruct the proceedings in the workshops because modern technology has helped us understand how the transfer of these patterns onto a canvas, panel or plate was done. This is valid particularly for paintings from the fifteenth and sixteenth century, when the underdrawing was executed with charcoal or ivory black. Working with infra-red reflectograms on Peter Aertsen's paintings, Yvette Bruijnen proved the repetitive use of patterns in his workshop.⁷ Later in the seven-teenth century the



Pl. 10 Jan Davidsz. de Heem, (detail) *Still Life with Tazza*
 canvas 45,5 x 60 cm, signed and dated 1653
 Private Collection



Pl. 11 Jan Davidsz. de Heem, (detail) *Still Life with Oysters*
 panel 47,4 x 63,4 cm, not signed
 Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum, Braunschweig

majority of painters used the brush for their preparatory drawing in oil. This technique leaves no traces. Some large workshops in the seventeenth century however, still use the traditional technique of underdrawing in charcoal, like the workshop of Balthasar van der Ast. Further IRR-documentation could provide more evidence.

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- 6) A pattern of the two leaves probably has served for all three paintings. Basis for the paintings (pl.10 & pl.11) was either painting (pl.9) or an unknown sketch. Painting (pl.10) shows more painterly quality, while painting (pl.11) proves to be more mechanical.
- 7) Bruijnen (1994) p.120



Pl. 9 Jan Davidsz. de Heem, (detail) *Still Life with Fruit*
panel 34,2 x 51,7 cm, signed and dated 1652
Private Collection

It was common practise for craftsmen to execute a painting in two steps. Both the underdrawing and the paintlayer have to be compared on stylistic grounds and on technique. After all a detailed analysis of the surface of a painting still provides the most reliable information.



Pl. 12 Jan Davidsz. de Heem, (detail) *Still Life with Nautilus-Cup*, panel 77,5 x 64,7 cm, signed and dated 1632, Barber Institute, Birmingham

A comparison of different executions based on the same pattern nearly always conveys certain differences. Rarely will one find identical adaptations which are of equal quality in drawing and nuances of coloring. May I present some detailed examples from paintings by Jan Davidsz. de Heem and Willem Claesz. Heda. In the catalogue of the Flegel exhibition of 1994, I pointed out some examples of variations in the execution of similar or identical subject and I found at least seven different Soreau-"hands".⁹



Pl. 13 Jan Davidsz. de Heem, *Still Life with Nautilus-Cup*, canvas 61,6 x 55 cm, signed and dated 1634 Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart

To me it is important to stress the various kinds of cooperation in the workshops: in some cases an assistant might have been trusted with the execution of the entire painting, in other cases, even in very small pictures - as is the case with some still lives by Flegel - various hands can be found.

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- 8) The nautilus-cup in the picture in Birmingham is painted with a transparency like a watercolor. Its amber-like coloring is of a rich subtle transition from light to dark. The nautilus-cup of the picture in Stuttgart shows more impasted paintlayer with a stronger tendency towards grey. The picturesque technique of the painting in Stuttgart (pl.13 & 14) corresponds with the picture in Antwerp (pl.15), which is signed: G. Gabron. Also evident in both paintings is the misunderstood reduction in perspective of the oval ("plum-stone-shape" instead of oval)
- 9) Wettengl (1993)pp.225-233



Pl. 14 Jan Davidsz. de Heem, (detail from pl.13)
Still Life with Nautilus-Cup, canvas 61,6 x 55 cm,
signed and dated 1634, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart



Pl. 15 Guilliam Gabron, (detail) *Still Life with Nautilus-Cup*, canvas 54,5 x 70,2 cm, signed and not dated,
Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp



Pl. 16 Jan Davidsz. de Heem, (detail from pl.13 & 14)
signature: J.D. de Heem



Pl. 17 Guilliam Gabron, (detail from pl.15)
signature: G. Gabron

These two kinds of workshop-participation can also be found in the paintings by Jan Breughel, Jan Davidsz. de Heem and Abraham Mignon. This raises the question about the participation and the possible corrections in a painting, done by a master who was at the same time an entrepreneur and manager of the workshop. Mignon occasionally managed the De Heem workshop in Utrecht. The tolerance and acceptance of the master is astonishing: many inferior parts in a painting - like wrong perspectives when drawing ovals or coarse contours - remained untouched, even though these shortcomings never appeared in those parts done by the master. All these weaknesses do not seem to have been an obstacle to employing the full workshop signature. The span of assistants in the workshop of De Heem who contributed to paintings bearing the full Jan Davidsz. de Heem signature, ranges from his son Cornelis over Joris van Son, Laurens Craen, Guillam Gabron, Philipp de Neef, Johannes Hannot and Abraham Mignon to Rachel Ruysch. By analyzing this aspect, I arrive at only seven authentic works in the exhibition on Jan Davidsz. de Heem which took place in 1991 in Utrecht and Braunschweig.¹⁰ The rest of the paintings in that exhibition had as provenance the workshop of Jan Davidz. de Heem but they were executed either entirely or in part by his assistants. May I introduce the reader to a very interesting example: a spirited work by one of De Heem's pupils. One understands the execution of the whole painting by carefully studying the typical detail of this striking still life. The pupil labors to adopt the effects of a



Pl. 18 Jan Davidsz. de Heem, (detail) *Still Life with a Silver Cup and a Glass Vase*, panel 46,5 x 58,5 cm, signed and dated 1642, Residenzgalerie, Salzburg

camera obscura viewing which are integrated with refined nuances into the master piece by Jan Davidsz. But the pupil exaggerates this exploitation of optical effects. He also has problems observing and rendering the shortening of the perspective. This becomes evident in the depiction of the Venetian glass and the pewter plate. Since this painting ranks among the best known, signed and dated works by the master, one has often tried to explain this faux-pas by using the lame excuse of "Monday's work". Art historically speaking this is not of course a sound explanation. Considering a workshop participation for most of these cases, it is important to note that mistakes of perception are signs of a certain awareness, which does not change accidentally. On the contrary one can even detect within the oeuvre certain pools of styles which are linked to typical shortcomings.

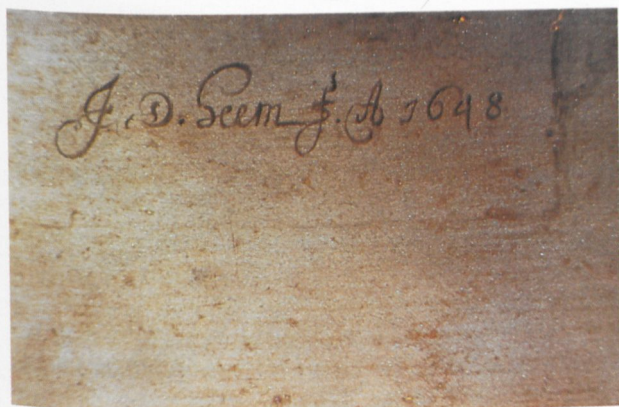
10) The details show various results from the study of reflexes of light in the workshop of De Heem. The painting in Karlsruhe (pl.20) convinces by its striking effect of different grades of tonality and its clear rendering of forms. The picture in Vaduz exaggerates the chiaro-scuro-contrasts, distorts the perspective and converts the optical effect of bubbles on the wine from a 'necklace of pearls' to an unoptical sequence of bubbles. (This also might be the result of observation with lenses of inferior quality or with the camera obscura) The picture in Salzburg (pl.18) is well drawn, but misses the fine graduation in the treatment of light. The regularly reappearing reflexes and the soft light spots recall the style of Philipp de Neef who was also a pupil of Jan Davidsz. de Heem. Compare this to the painting by Philipp de Neef, conserved at the Castello Sforzesco in Milan.
Exhibition: *JAN DAVIDSZ DE HEEM EN ZIJN KRING*, Utrecht / Braunschweig 1991



Pl. 19 Jan Davidsz. de Heem, (detail) *Still Life with Stoneware Jug*, panel 45,5 x 64,5 cm, s/d 1648, Collection of the Prince of Liechtenstein



Pl. 20 Jan Davidsz. de Heem, *Still Life with Fruit* panel 34,5 x 53,8 cm, signed but not dated Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe



Pl. 21 Jan Davidsz. de Heem, (detail from pl.19) panel 45,5 x 64,5 cm, signed and dated 1648, Collection of the Prince of Liechtenstein, Vaduz

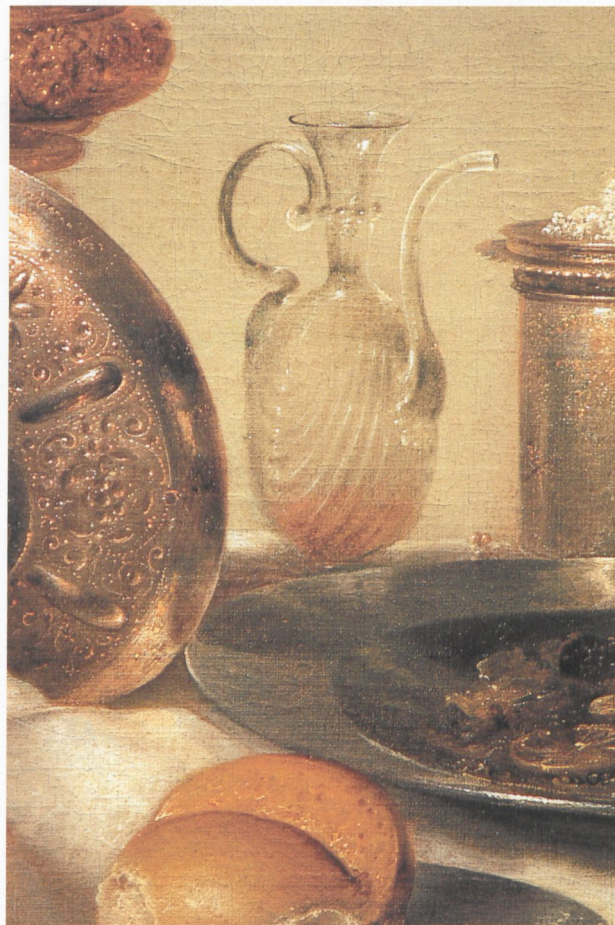


Pl. 22 Jan Davidsz. de Heem, (detail from pl.20) panel 34,5 x 53,8 cm, signed but not dated Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe

A last remark concerns the signatures. In the seventeenth century the signatures which were employed by the workshops began to be changed. The Rembrandt workshop provides a good example for this aspect.¹¹ Detailed research has conveyed the variants of signatures the masters employed to indicate the different workshop participation. Some added their first name, or left it out, some abbreviated it or wrote it in full, some added mysterious signs or letters. (paintings from the late De Heem period are fitted with an additional `R`) These modifications were less a standardized change of the workshop's signature, but rather an individual variation, which expressed the participation of an assistant or another artist of equal status. Sometimes the modified signature explained a special involvement of the master who signed it.



Pl. 23 Willem Claesz. Heda, (detail) *A Banquet*
 canvas 106 x 109 cm, signed and dated 1635
 National Gallery of Art, Washington

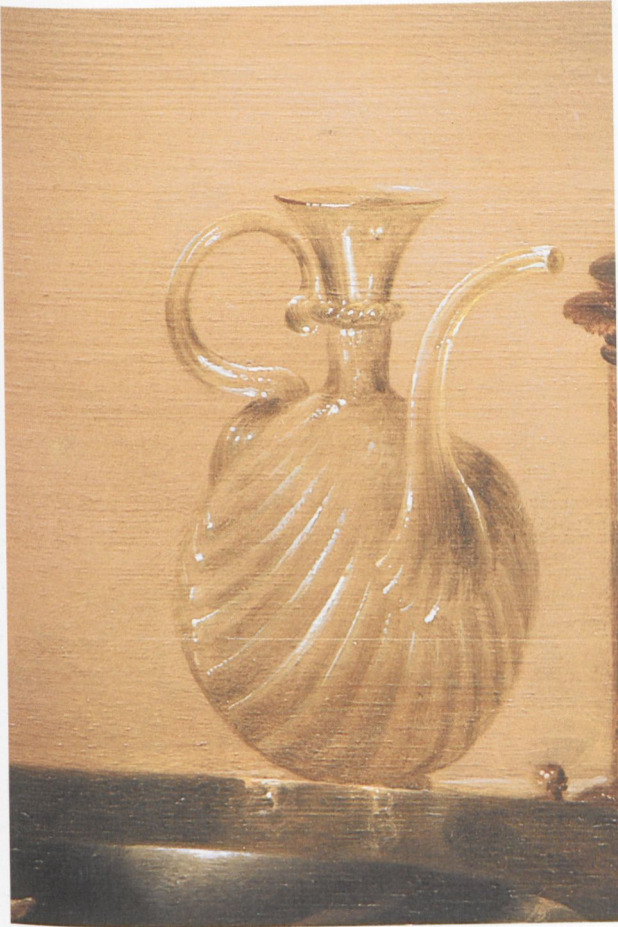


Pl. 24 Willem Claesz. Heda, (detail) *A Banquet*
 canvas 106 x 109 cm, signed and dated 1635
 National Gallery of Art, Washington

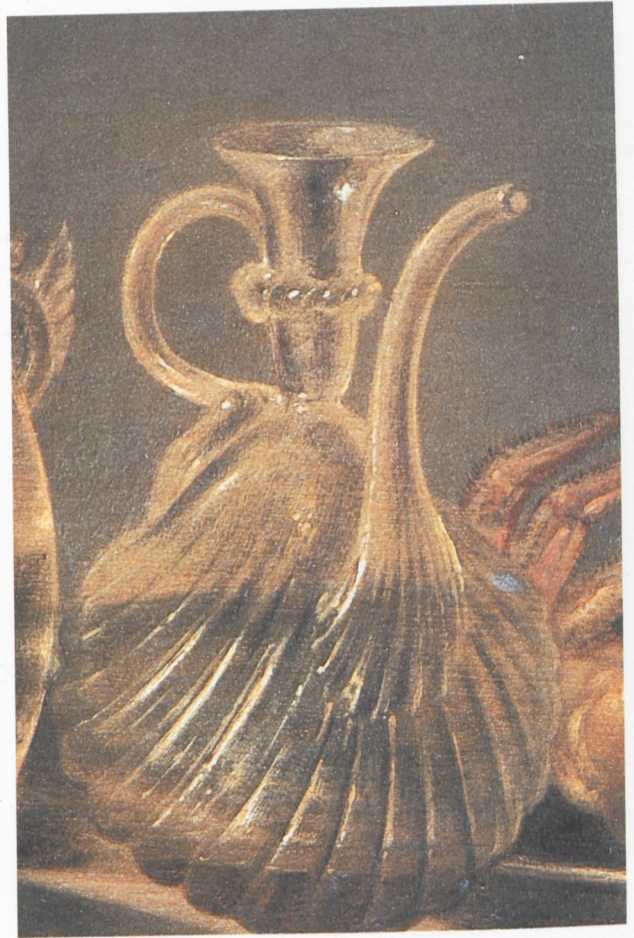
11) compare my remarks on the Rembrandt project: *Forschungsbeispiel Rembrandt*, in: *Restauro*, 3/1992, pp.172 ff.

12) The two glass pitchers of the year 1635 come from the same pattern, since they are absolutely identical even in the reflections of light. The same pitcher is reproduced in another pattern, showing it from a different angle. The execution is linear and a routine work. For reasons of composition the pitcher's shape has suffered a little. It was made slightly smaller. The fact that this pattern was used again in Heda's workshop is proven by the existence of the painting in the Louvre which is not a copy, but a workshop repetition (pl.26). The painting in Washington is signed twice: it is signed in full at the lower right (pl.23) and it shows a cryptogram at the lower left (pl.27). This cryptogram does not bear any relation to any of the known followers of Heda and the most prominent followers of Willem Claesz. Heda, like his son Gerrit Willemz., his pupil Maerten Boelema, Cornelis Mahu, or Gerrit van Vucht would not fit. The same cryptogram can be found on the blade of a table knife in a picture kept in Schwerin (pl.28).

A different cryptogram is shown in plate 36, which resembles the one in plate 27.



Pl. 25 Willem Claesz. Heda, (detail) *A Banquet*
canvas 87 x 113 cm, signed and dated 1635
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Pl. 26 Willem Claesz. Heda, (detail) *Still Life with Lobster*
panel 68 x 81 cm, signed and dated 1647
Louvre, Paris



Pl. 27 Willem Claesz. Heda, (detail) *A Banquet*
canvas 106 x 109 cm, signed and dated 1635
National Gallery of Art, Washington



Pl. 28 Unknown Haarlem Master, (detail) *A Still Life*
panel 43,5 x 41,5 cm, signed with cryptogram, not
dated, Staatliches Museum, Schwerin (as by Claesz.)



Pl. 29 Unknown Haarlem Master, *A Still Life a Roemer*
panel 43,5 x 41,5 cm, signed with cryptogram, not dated, Staatliches Museum, Schwerin (as by Claesz.)

In this context I would like to present several variations of the workshop signature of Pieter Claesz. One in particular indicates the participation of one of his best collaborators, Cornelis Cruys. Fortunately Cruys also invented and painted a few independent works and signed them, so that, based on these works one can agree with the result of the research. The date in those Claesz.'s - Cruys collaboration paintings bears an apocryphical and stylized 4, which omitting the diagonal cross bar, reads to the scholar like an 'X' (= cross = Cruys)

Other examples contain added horizontal bars or letters. Others have one or two hooks added to the signature, always applied to the blade of the well known table knife. These clearly visible additional



Pl. 30 Willem Claesz. Heda, (detail) *A Banquet*
panel 54 x 74 cm, signed and dated 1646
Private Collection

signs or letters mark a change in the concept of the artist's responsibility. Even though these signs were clearly visible, their character often remained enigmatic. The use of signatures link-ed to cooperatively produced paintings and the appearance of these new signatures of the artist who became eventually indepent happened at the same time. Also the paintings concerned were similar in style. In most cases one can assume that the executing artist was already granted special rights or privileges, more than would have been conseded to an ordinary skilled painter.

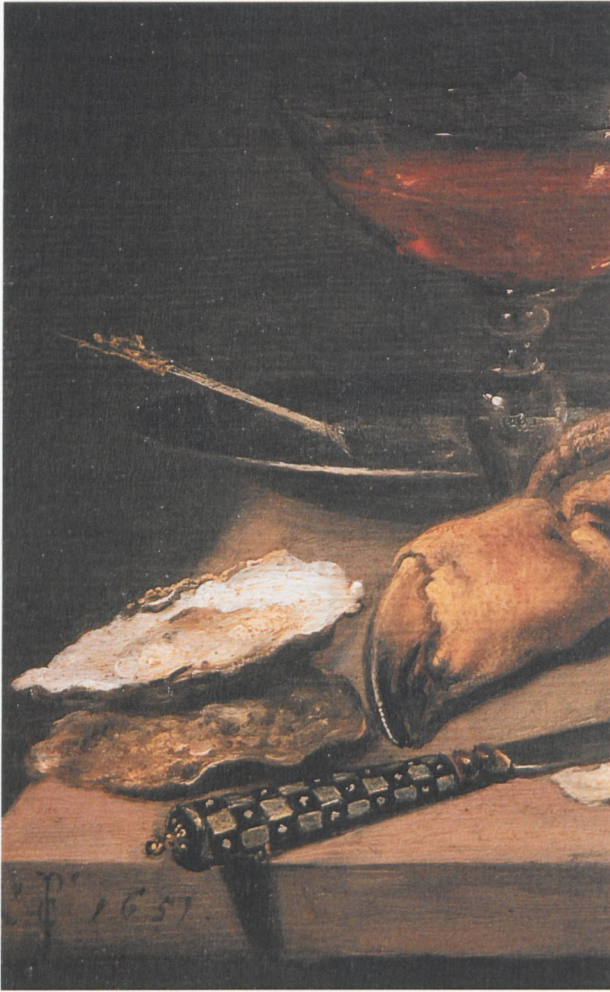


Pl. 31 Willem Claesz. Heda, (detail) *A Banquet*
panel 68,5 x 50 cm, signed and dated 1640
Mauritshuis, The Hague



Pl. 32 Willem Claesz. Heda, (detail) *A Banquet*
canvas 118 x 118 cm, signed and dated 1648
Hermitage, St. Petersburg

- 14) Similar reflexes of light on the glass pitcher proves the existence of pattern where the pitcher is turned to the left (in reverse to pl. 25/26). The light meets the pitcher from a different angle, but light and shadow are similarly treated. The painting of pl.30 shows a free painterly brushstroke, but also pl.32 proves a masterly hand.



Pl. 33 Pieter Claesz., loosely executed and authentic painting, datable to 1651 with monogram



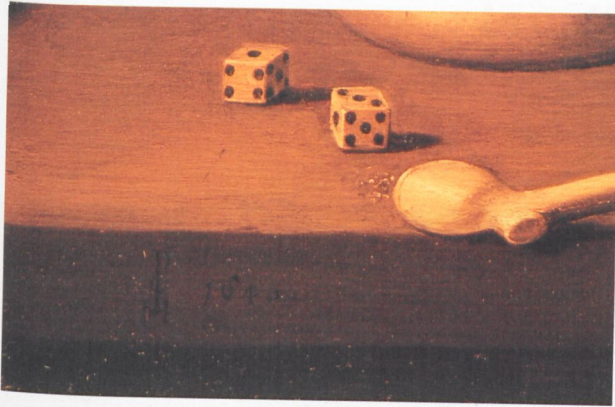
Pl. 35 Pieter Claesz. and workshop, unknown master, datable to 1640-45, rigid monogram with hook



Pl. 34 soft and somber painting, 165(4?), signature is caligraphic and could possibly read 'Cla...'



Pl. 36 Unknown master, 1647 with badly drawn monogram, the base of it forming an M or H or two I



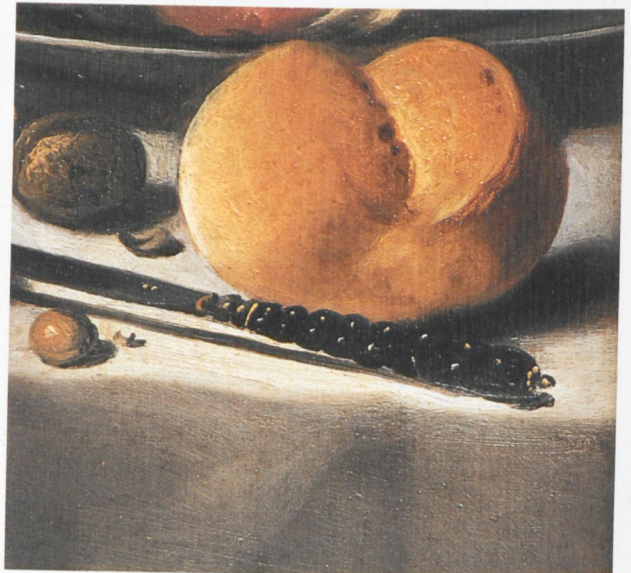
Pl. 37 Unknown master, ca. 1640, sleek and sharp painting, monogram with its base forming a M or H or two I



Pl. 40 painting with partially strong local colors and heavy impasto, which is typical for Cruys, ca. 1644, monogram with hook at bottom of P



Pl. 38 monogram of a typical painting by Cornelis Cruys



Pl. 41 example for often appearing additional marks, usually with one or two yellow hooks on the blade



Pl. 39 painterly similar to painting pl.40, dated 1646, rigid monogram, the 4 of the date is written like a cross (= Cruys)

Beyond the standard contract between master and apprentice or skilled collaborator Pieter Claesz. seems to have granted artists like Cornelis Cruys and Roelof Koets special rights, since they already signed works with their own name while they were still working for Pieter Claesz. or shortly after they had left his workshop.

(Translation from the German by EL)