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## Stilled lives: self-portraiture and self-reflection in seventeenth-century Netherlandish still-life painting

*Celeste Brusati*

In the early decades of the seventeenth century, Netherlandish artists created a new, hybrid genre of self-portraiture in the form of still-life easel paintings featuring one or more images of their makers. Among the earliest instances of this phenomenon is a still life of 1611 by the Antwerp painter Clara Peeters (fig. 1), which shows diminutive images of the artist at her easel reflected on the polished surfaces of the finely wrought gold gilt goblet which she has exquisitely re-crafted in paint at the center of her picture.<sup>1</sup> Similar images of artists, mirrored in the worlds they paint, silently testifying to the imitative power of their art, soon became familiar tropes of both painter and painting in Dutch still lifes. Examples abound in the works of Pieter Claesz, Jan de Heem, and Abraham van Beyeren, to name only a few of the better-known painters who depicted themselves in still lifes. A great many of these paintings employ reflective devices which, like the spherical mirror in Claesz's *Vanitas still life* in Nuremberg (fig. 2), draw into the picture an image of the artist ostensibly caught in the act of painting it. Other paintings, like David Bailly's ambitious *Vanitas still life* of 1651 (fig. 3) incorporate paintings, prints or drawings of the artist into a larger collection of objects presented for view. What is at once striking and noteworthy about all these self-representations—as distinct from conventional self-portraits—is the conspicuous way in which they confound the representation of art and artist. Instead of appearing in their pictures as embodied human subjects according to the

usual conventions of portraiture, these still-life painters transform themselves into *pictures*, and appear as pictorial images displayed among other representations and products of their art.

Still-life self-images such as these depart significantly from what we generally think of as the humanist tradition of self-portraiture, with its focus on the corporeal representation of individuals whose physiognomy, clothing, gestures and demeanor serve as the primary indicators of their social identity. Painters working within this figural tradition typically sought to upgrade or assert their professional status by identifying themselves as courtiers or literati and by dissociating themselves pictorially from the artisanal aspects of their art. Rubens's portrayal of himself in the group portrait known as *The four philosophers* (fig. 4) exemplifies such strategies. Here the artist excludes all traces of his manual labor to assert his supra-artisanal social and intellectual status. He presents himself, along with the Antwerp humanist Jan Woverius, as a fellow scholar and heir to the philosophical tradition embodied in the commemorative portraits of Rubens's recently deceased brother Philip, Philip's mentor Lipsius, and their ultimate mentor, Seneca himself, whose portrait bust is ensconced appropriately in the niche at upper right.

In marked contrast to this type of portrait, Netherlandish still-life self-images deploy a variety of pictorial strategies aimed at valorizing the artist on different terms. The makers of these works do not assert the intel-

<sup>1</sup> Madrid, Museo del Prado, inv. nr. 1620. This panel, which measures 50 × 72 cm, is related in size and subject to three other still lifes by Peeters in the Prado, inv. nrs. 1619, 1621, and 1622. See Matias Diaz Padron, *Escuela flamenca siglo XVII*, Madrid (Museo del Prado) 1975, nr. 1620, pp. 21–22, and Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women artists 1550–1950*, New York 1976, p. 33. I am aware of only one still-life self-image which predates Clara Peeters's work

and that is an anonymous panel of 1538 now in the Kröller-Müller Museum at Otterlo which depicts an array of objects shelved in an open cabinet. The picture is illustrated in Miriam Milman, *The illusions of reality: trompe-l'oeil painting*, New York 1983, p. 44. The reflected image of the artist is visible in the glass flask placed at the center of the upper shelf.



1 Clara Peeters, *Still life*, 1611. Madrid, Museo del Prado



2 Pieter Claesz, *Vanitas Still life*. Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum



3 David Bailly, *Self-portrait with vanitas still life*, 1651. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal

lectual at the expense of the mechanical aspects of painting, but rather take great pains to associate and even to identify themselves with the representational craft of painting. In doing so they register a decidedly artisanal component of the professional self-consciousness which many Dutch and Flemish artists shared. Their works give splendid witness to a vital form of Netherlandish artistic identity which cuts across the distinction usually drawn between the painter as craftsman and the painter as self-conscious professional. In what follows I want to suggest how the pictorial identification of self and art effected in these pictures might expand our understanding of the ways in which artistic identities could be conceived of and represented in the Netherlands of the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup>

In considering the reasons why this distinctive form of self-imagery may have appealed so strongly to Netherlandish artists, two sets of cultural circumstances seem

<sup>2</sup> In speaking of a pictorial identification of self and art I should make clear at the outset that I am not using the term self in the modern psychological sense or to refer to a self which exists prior to and independent of the picture. I am using this formulation instead to point to a form of subjectivity or subject-position that is constituted in representation, and more specifically in the process of self-reflexive painting.



4 Peter Paul Rubens, *Four philosophers*. Florence, Palazzo Pitti

particularly relevant. The first concerns the way in which painters became professionalized in the Netherlands, and the second has to do with the value collectors attached to the mimetic virtuosity so copiously evident in still-life painting. It is important to remember that the efforts of Netherlandish artists to improve their social and professional status during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries took place largely within the structures of the craft guilds rather than in opposition to them.<sup>3</sup> In the Netherlands the idea that painters should be seen as practitioners of a liberal art did not supersede, but rather was assimilated into well-established artisanal structures and values. Both in their written defenses of painting and in their efforts to gain pre-eminence within the hierarchical organization of the guilds, Dutch painters tended less to disavow their links to the artisanal world than to claim a privileged place within it, vaunting painting as the epitome of craft, and valorizing the painter as the supreme craftsman.<sup>4</sup>

Artisanal values are very much in evidence in the vernacular art literature of the Netherlands, where the artist-authors of these texts devote considerable attention to celebrating the manual dexterity, imitative skill and technical prowess of their compatriots. One need only look to Karel van Mander's *Schilder-boeck*, which contains the first history of Netherlandish art, to see how the value of technical ingenuity is established at the outset in the presentation of Jan van Eyck's putative invention of oil paint as the foundation of a new pictorial tradition with unprecedented mimetic possibilities.<sup>5</sup> In the biographies that follow, van Mander consistently

praises painters for the patience, diligence and precision of their labors, whatever their other achievements may be. In 1641, the Leiden painter Philips Angel extolled the virtues of artisanal industry and imitative skill even further in an address delivered to the painters of his home town when they were seeking to bolster their economic and social status by forming a guild of their own. In making his case for the profitability and respectability of painting as a trade, Angel made much of what he called the "schijn-eyghentlijke kracht," or the appearance-simulating power of painting which resides in the seductive visual appeal of its well-wrought surfaces. As far as Angel was concerned this expertise in duplicating the look of rich and varied materials in paint, for which Leiden painters became renowned, was of crucial importance. He claimed that this skill above all else empowered painters to captivate the eyes of the consumers and collectors who would ultimately be induced to buy their highly finished pictures.<sup>6</sup>

Angel's remarks may serve as a reminder that the displays of technical mastery through which Netherlandish artists were inclined to represent themselves testify not only to the artisanal underpinnings of their professional identities, but also to the economic and aesthetic value which collectors attached to the mimetic virtuosity so copiously evident in Dutch still-life painting.<sup>7</sup> We know that the earliest collectors of still lifes came from courtly and aristocratic circles, and that their patronage conferred prestige and high repute upon the painters whose work they sought to acquire. The appearance of self-imagery in still life within a decade of its

3 On the part played by the guilds in the professionalization of painting in the northern Netherlands see Hessel Miedema, "Kunst-schilders, gilde en academie: over het probleem van de emancipatie van de kunstschilders in de Noordelijke Nederlanden van de 16de en 17de eeuw," *Oud Holland* 101 (1987), pp. 1-34, and Eric J. Sluijter, "Schilders van 'cleyn, subtile ende curieuse dingen.'" *Leidse 'fijnschilders' in contemporaine bronnen*," in *Leidse fijnschilders: van Gerrit Dou tot Frans van Mieris de Jonge 1630-1760*, Leiden (Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal) 1988, pp. 14-77, esp. pp. 29-34. For a discussion of these issues in the southern Netherlands, see Zirka Filipczak, *Picturing art in Antwerp 1500-1700*, Princeton 1987.

4 For useful discussions of the status of craft in forming the professional identity of Dutch painters see Svetlana Alpers, *The art of describing*, Chicago 1983, pp. 112-18, and Sluijter, op. cit. (note 3), pp. 28-34.

5 Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-boeck*, Haarlem 1604, fols. 200-02.

6 Philips Angel, *Lof der schilder-konst*, Leiden 1642, esp. pp. 39-40 for the "schijn-eyghentlijke kracht" of painting. See also the discussion of this notion in Sluijter, op. cit. (note 3), pp. 19-23.

7 The rhetorical insistence of seventeenth-century art theorists on the subordinate relationship of still life to figure painting undersees the extent to which this hierarchy actually needed to be argued. Samuel van Hoogstraeten's often-cited remarks on the three degrees of pictorial subject matter in his *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilder-konst*, Rotterdam 1678, pp. 85-87 offer a revealing case in point, for they presume an audience which evaluates paintings principally on the basis of mimetic virtuosity. He takes great pains to explain to his readers that the value of pictures depends not only on the imitative skill they display, but also on the significance of their subjects. Just as the most deceptively rendered still life cannot exceed the inherent limitations of its subject category, he argues, neither do uninspired likenesses or incompetent histories merit inclusion in the higher categories merely by virtue of their subjects. The salient point about this passage is not simply the fact that van Hoogstraeten assigned still life to the lowest of category of subject matter, but rather that he felt compelled to assert the interdependence of subject matter and skill as evaluative criteria, and ultimately to make a case for judging each subject category according to its own merits.



5 Clara Peeters, *Still life*, 1612. Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle

emergence as an independent genre may well be the most articulate evidence we have of the formation of types of professional self-consciousness intimately bound up with the consummate craftsmanship for which still-life painting was so highly valued by its public.

In turning to the paintings I want to focus my comments on what I see as three representative types of still-life self-images, and on the notions of art and artistic identity to which they call attention. The first category is exemplified in a seminal work of 1612, by Clara Peeters, which is now in Karlsruhe (fig. 5).<sup>8</sup> This elegant picture features tulips and wild flowers in a stoneware vase, a gold chain spilling out of a celadon-green Ming bowl, a

<sup>8</sup> Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle, inv. nr. 2222. The picture is painted on an oak panel and measures 59.5 cm × 49 cm. See further the informative commentary on this painting by Jan Lauts in *Stilleben alter Meister I: Niederländer und Deutsche*, Karlsruhe (Staatliche Kunsthalle) 1983, pp. 13–17; and cat. *150 Gemälde vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, Karlsruhe (Staatliche Kunsthalle) 1988, p. 76.

pile of gold coins, and four exotic and intricately patterned shells. It also displays two silver, covered goblets gilt in gold, one of which bears no less than eight mildly distorted images of the artist mirrored on its globular surface (cf. fig. 6). It is difficult to imagine a more dramatic contrast to these tiny, seemingly incidental reflections of Clara Peeters than the commanding portrait of himself which Rubens fashioned in the *Four philosophers*. Where Rubens eschews his identity as a tradesman, Peeters depicts herself frankly at work before her easel, with palette in hand. Where Rubens acquits himself masterfully in the human portrayals which are the measure of his art, Peeters displays the skill of hand and eye which are the measure of hers. Her frank acknowledgement of the artisanal basis of her professional identity has a close parallel in the conventional self-portraits of her compatriots, who began in the mid-sixteenth century to display the tools of their trade as professional



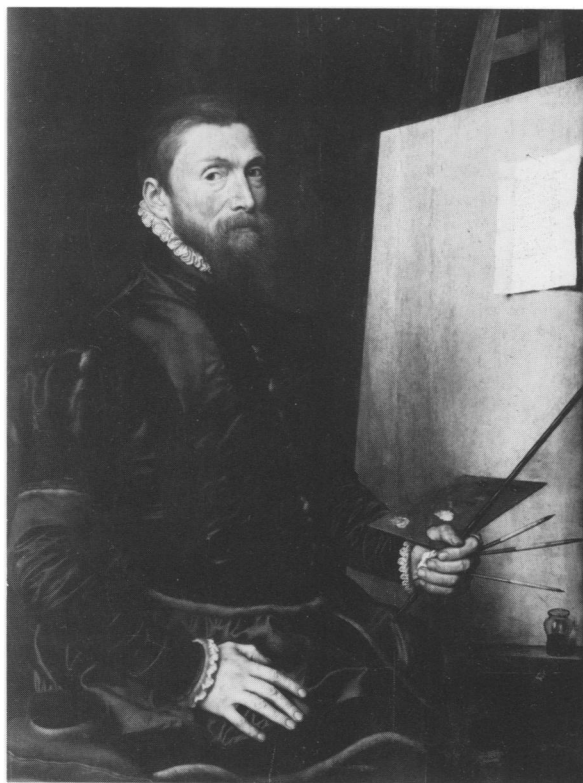
6 Detail of the goblet from fig. 5.

attributes, even as they sought to dignify the status of their profession.<sup>9</sup> Anthonis Mor epitomizes this tendency in his well-known *Self-portrait* of 1558 (fig. 7), in which he appears with brushes and palette in hand opposite a blank panel on his easel. With characteristic humanist wit, the artist pre-emptively represents his own labor, offering instead pictorial evidence not only of his skills as a portraitist but also of his imitative prowess in the illusionistic rendering of a slip of paper attached to his panel. It is inscribed with a laudatory Latin verse by Lampsonius which identifies Mor as the most famous of painters and locates his artistry at the apex of a classical tradition by claiming Mor's superiority to Apelles.<sup>10</sup>

If Peeters shares her compatriot's interest in portraying the artist's tools as professional attributes, her self-images are distinguished from Mor's conventional self-portrait in their pictorial elision of the representation of the artist with the representation of her art. Her reflected images pictorially attest on the one hand to the imitative skill with which she is able to render accurately the outward appearances of things. On the other hand, her self-images duplicate the mirror-like artifice of the picture as a whole, and in this way contribute to what we might call the "eyewitness" fiction of her picture. Through this artifice we are meant to understand the claim that Peeters's picture makes of exactly reflecting what was placed before her skilled hand and eye. It is particularly significant in this regard that she has carefully placed her attenuated reflections at different positions on each of the goblet's convex bubbles, precisely as these images would appear from the artist's vantage point. Although this feature of Peeters's picture has been interpreted as an allusion to the deceptive and unreliable nature of vision, there is even more reason to see it as a dazzling demonstration of her knowledge of perspective and the laws of optics.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Filipczak, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp. 11–24, has linked the appearance of this type of *portrait d'apparat* to changes in the terminology and marketing of painting which are indicative of its newly privileged status as what might be termed nowadays as a "high end" craft.

<sup>10</sup> Mor also refers the work of his hand to his privileged social position in the inscription on his easel, "Ant. Morus Philippi. Hisp. Reg. Pictor sua ipse depictus manu 1558," which identifies him as court painter to Philip II while marking the portrait as painted by his own hand. See *Gli Uffizi: catalogo generale*, Florence 1979, nr. 1637, p. 939; and Filipczak, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp. 21, 25–26.



7 Anthonis Mor, *Self-portrait*, 1558. Florence, Uffizi

For all the boldness of their claims to mastery, Peeters's self-images are nonetheless remarkably self-effacing. As explicit as they are about her mimetic skill and her mastery of optical phenomena, they suggest virtually nothing about the individual character or personality of the artist. It is less her person than her technical prowess and the imitative power of her art that the images reveal. One might say that Peeters makes her own likeness appear to be simply a by-product of her art and its specular artifice. And it is in her command of that

<sup>11</sup> For the symbolic reading of Peeters's self-reflections, see E. de Wilde, "'Stilleven' door Clara Peeters," *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* (1967), pp. 35–42; and H.-J. Raupp, *Untersuchungen zu Künstlerbildnis und Künstlerdarstellung in den Niederlanden im 17. Jahrhundert*, Hildesheim 1984, p. 285. For a different approach to this question, see exhib. cat. *La peinture dans la peinture*, Dijon (Musée de Beaux-Arts) 1982–83, pp. 186–89, where Anne-Marie Lecoq writes suggestively about what she sees as a tension inherent in the phenomenon of pictorial self-reflections which identify the image of the painter with an image of vanity.



8 Jan van Eyck, *Van der Paele Madonna*, 1436. Bruges, Groeningemuseum

replicative artifice and the power it offers her that she gives form to her professional identity.

Although Peeters's reflected self-images are among the first to appear in still-life easel paintings, the pictorial *topos* itself goes back to Jan van Eyck's *Van der Paele Madonna* of 1436 (fig. 8), in which the artist at his easel is mirrored in miniature in the armor of St George. Here the implicit witness and recorder of the scene is the legendary inventor of oil paint, the technical innovation that made possible the optical refinement and jewel-like finish which became hallmarks of Netherlandish art. I am inclined to think that Peeters was familiar with van Eyck's picture, which was then on view in the Church of St Donation in Bruges, and that she meant to invoke the example of her illustrious predecessor, not only in the reflected images of herself at her easel, but also in her use of the multi-faceted goblet to multiply those images, just as van Eyck had multiplied images of the Madonna in St George's shining ribbed helmet. Peeters's kaleidoscopic self-reflections might seem exaggerated at first glance; yet their insistence is also a poignant reminder of the determination with which this young woman painter sought to claim her professional identity. By means of her Eyckian self-images Peeters could proudly proclaim

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Ingvar Bergström, "Portraits of gilt Cups by Pieter Claesz," *Tableau* 5 (1983), pp. 440–45, for documentation concerning the many specialized craftsmen involved in the production of the drinking cup of the Haarlem Brewers' Guild which was, in turn, depicted by Pieter Claesz.

<sup>13</sup> I am thinking here of works like the flower pieces of de Gheyn and Bosschaert, which were both labor-intensive in their production

not only her technical mastery, but also her cultural identity as heir to a pictorial tradition that had always privileged mimetic virtuosity and representational craft.

Peeters's *Still life* celebrates those values in a number of ways. The most immediately obvious is her meticulous re-crafting in paint of finely wrought objects which are themselves carefully chosen products of consummate craftsmanship. We know, for example, that gilt goblets like those in her painting could represent the combined skills of several master craftsmen, including the draftsman and/or sculptor who drew the designs, the silver and goldsmiths who executed them, and possibly still other metalsmiths who applied the chasing and ornamentation.<sup>12</sup> We also know that the celadon-green Ming bowl was a recently imported product of a Chinese technology then highly valued in Europe, where the craft of firing porcelain had not yet been developed. Peeters asserts the power of her own representational craft to fashion pictorial counterfeits of all of these products of human ingenuity. Beyond that, she also shows how her artistry vies with nature's own, particularly when she attends to such items as the checkered fritillaria or snake's-head bloom drooping from its stem, or the colorfully patterned shells, which were especially prized at the time as exempla of nature's imitation of human artistry.

By turning her imitative skill to the crafting of luxury items and coveted rarities, Peeters further enhances the art with which she identifies by calling attention to the way it produces value. The objects displayed in her picture are all collectables of the sort that would have been found in the *kunstkamers* of seventeenth-century merchants and virtuosi. Representations of such aesthetic commodities were among the earliest and most expensive still-life easel paintings. These pictures, which were luxury items in their own right, could rival in cost some of the valuables they depicted.<sup>13</sup> Because of the imitative virtuosity they displayed and the surrogate possession they offered, they also formed a key element in these collections of art and rarities. Painted depictions of collector's cabinets commonly call attention to this proud and highly prized. The examples most commonly cited are the flower painting commissioned by the States-General in 1606 from Jacques de Gheyn for 600 guilders, and the large flower piece for which Bosschaert asked 1,000 guilders in 1620. On these pictures see I. Bergström, *Dutch still-life painting in the seventeenth century*, New York 1956, pp. 45, 60–61.





9 Cornelis de Baellieur, *Collector's cabinet*.  
Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts

perty of pictures by showing products of natural and human artistry in the company of their painted surrogates. Cornelis de Baellieur does just this in his *Collector's cabinet* in Dijon (fig. 9), where a prominently featured still-life painting serves to bring flowers, an exotic bird, fruits and other artifacts into the pictured collection.<sup>14</sup> In her *Still life*, Peeters invites us to consider the value of such artistry when she uses what amounts to pictorial alchemy to fashion collectables out of paint, turning base pigment into gold, which she represents here in several forms, from the gilt covered goblets to the long chain and the coins. Through this pictorial strategy she calls attention to the commodification of her artistry, duplicating in representation what she does when she exchanges her paintings for money.<sup>15</sup>

By focusing as I have on the notions of art and artist which inform Peeters's picture I have deliberately avoided the one issue that has dominated interpretive discussions of this and virtually all still-life pictures; namely, the *vanitas* implications of still-life imagery. While few commentators fail to note the extraordinary technical refinement of these works, their discussions tend to locate the "meaning" of still-life paintings exclu-

sively in the symbolic order, where such details as the artists' reflected images and the luxury items they depict can be read as emblems of the transience of human existence and worldly possessions. I think there can be no question that still lifes like those by Clara Peeters engage a concern with mortality and the fragility of human life—its pleasures, passions, possessions and ambitions. Indeed, it could be argued that this obsession with the ephemeral is fundamental to all European still-life painting. But on what terms and through what representational strategies is that concern registered in these pictures? What does it mean to craft mirror images that are not fugitive but fixed and stabilized, or flowers that are forever preserved in paint? Are these pictures produced *primarily* to offer moral edification and reminders of mortality? Do they not also nurture the cherished fiction that that which is most ephemeral can be possessed and preserved—at least in art—from the ravages of time? There seems little question that both these impulses feed into Dutch still-life painting and register its audience's deeply rooted ambivalence toward possessions and worldly attachments that were both desired and feared. Yet in the case of still-life self-imagery, the purposeful valorization of the artist's craft asserts art's

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Georget discusses this pictorial strategy in terms of a *paragone* between art and nature constructed within the painting in *La peinture*, cit. (note 11), pp. 164–66.

<sup>15</sup> Alberto Veca alludes to this phenomenon in exhib. cat. *Vanitas: il simbolismo del tempo*, Bergamo (Galleria Lorenzelli) 1981, pp. 30–31.



10 Vincent Laurensz. van der Vinne, *Still life with glass sphere*. Moscow, Pushkin Museum

power over the brevity of life in ways which undermine, or at the very least complicate the *vanitas* symbolism which these pictures may contain.<sup>16</sup>

In many instances these works invite us to attend to the ways in which the painter's representational craft is capable of stilling time and life for visual consumption and contemplation. The Haarlem painter Vincent van der Vinne provides such an occasion in a curious still life

<sup>16</sup> Attempts to expand the ways we approach the interpretation of still life which I found useful include exhib. cat. *Stilleben in Europa* Münster (Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte) & Baden-Baden (Staatliche Kunsthalle) 1979-80; Veca, op. cit. (note 15); *La peinture*, cit. (note 11); and Alpers, op. cit. (note 4), pp. 72-118. A provocative intervention in this interpretative discussion is Norman Bryson's recent essay on Dutch still life in his *Looking at the overlooked: four essays on still-life painting*, Cambridge 1990, pp. 96-135, esp. 115-21. Bryson tries to move out of the art-historical debate over whether or not to attribute allegorical meanings to still-life imagery, by offering a semiotic account of what he sees as the agonized relations between the verbal and visual discourses which he finds constitutive of *vanitas* as a genre.

<sup>17</sup> See Yury Kuznetsov and Irene Linnik, *Dutch painting in Soviet*

now in Moscow (fig. 10), in which the artist presents his own image reflected in a glass sphere.<sup>17</sup> This virtuoso self-reflection is exhibited prominently amidst a collection of objects which allude to temporality in a variety of ways. The assemblage includes an hourglass at upper right, a traditional emblem of transience, a lute and flute suggestive of the temporal dimension of music, an almanac and a large monogrammed journal of the type used by merchants to record the chronology of their business transactions.<sup>18</sup> Van der Vinne has positioned the reflecting sphere carefully beside the account book so that his own image partially masks the merchant's mark inscribed on the book's cover. The conspicuous juxtaposition of the artist's self-image with the commercial insignia which served to identify both documents and merchandise as the property of a particular merchant adds a proprietary dimension to van der Vinne's self-representational artifice. Through it the artist both identifies with and lays claim to the mimetic artistry that his self-reflection represents. By placing the sphere on a pedestal directly over two documents, one a written record and the other a pictorial one, he further underscores the way in which his self-image purports to record and fix in representation a specific moment in time when he putatively sat before and depicted the assemblage of objects which constitute his still life.

Simon Luttichuys, a Dutch painter who specialized both in still life and portraiture, represented himself by means of a similar artifice in a *Still life* of 1646 (fig. 11), which offers a splendid pictorial commentary on the power of his own art to capture and possess the world in representation.<sup>19</sup> The image of the artist in the studio, putatively painting the picture at which we are looking, appears on the shining surface of a mirroring globe suspended above an array of representational artifacts, both

*museums*, New York & Leningrad 1982, nr. 273; and E. de Jongh, exhib. cat. *Still life in the age of Rembrandt*, Auckland (Auckland City Art Gallery) 1982, p. 220.

<sup>18</sup> On the uses of these journals and on the merchants' marks with which they are inscribed, see the interesting note by Basil Yamey, "Account-book covers in some *vanitas* still-life paintings," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 47 (1984), pp. 229-31.

<sup>19</sup> Panel 46 × 67 cm. For less positive readings of this picture's imagery see Claus Grimm, *Stilleben: die Niederländischen und Deutschen Meister*, Stuttgart & Zurich 1988, p. 152, where it is discussed as an allegory of vanity, and I. Bergström in exhib. cat. *Still lifes of the Golden Age: northern European paintings from the Heinz family collection*, Washington (National Gallery of Art) 1989, pp. 114-16, where it is interpreted as an allegory of the arts with *vanitas* associations.



11 Simon Luttichuys, *Still-life allegory of the arts*, 1646. USA, private collection

descriptive and commemorative. Hovering between its own shadow image on the wall and the celestial globe on the table, this self-reflexive mirror represents the mimetic power of the painter's art within the picture. The formal association of the sphere with the array of portrait heads below it further suggests the implicit similarity of its reflexive artifice to the specular activity through which the human mind was thought to comprehend the world.<sup>20</sup> As a celebration of the encyclopedic purview of the painter's art, Luttichuys's still life can be understood as a Dutch counterpart to the more extensively elaborated *kunstkamer* paintings which were produced almost exclusively in Antwerp. Like de Baellieur's painted collector's cabinet, Luttichuys's still-life catalogues, albeit in abbreviated fashion, those pictorial representations—the celestial globe, the map, the illustrated herbal, the topographical illustrations and the commemorative portrayals—by which the cosmos and the past could be domesticated for the eye. Yet here the

<sup>20</sup> This notion of speculation also figures in de Baellieur's painted *kunstkamer* (fig. 9), where a similar mirroring globe hangs suspended over a table laden with illustrated books, scientific instruments, *naturalia*, and statuary. In this case the orb is compared through formal juxtapositions to the microcosmic model known as the Drebbel sphere on the table and the large globe on the floor to the left of it.



12 Vincent Laurensz. van der Vinne, *Vanitas still life*. Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum



13 Pieter van Steenwijck, *Still life commemorating Maarten Tromp*. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal

universal scope of painting is inscribed within the depicted space of the painter's studio rather than the mythic realm of *Pictura* or the space of the collector's cabinet. Moreover, the reflective artifice of Lutichuys's self-image reinforces the painter's controlling claim to the all-encompassing power of his art. By figuring himself simultaneously as beholder, subject and maker of the image, the painter asserts his pictorial omnipotence, effectively appropriating all of the positions within his picture's representational economy.<sup>21</sup>

The power of pictorial representations to make the past present to the eye and counteract the effects of time is a central concern of a second type of still life which serves to commemorate the artist's life and art. In these works the artist's self-portrait appears in the form of a depicted painting, print or drawing like the one van der Vinne has included in a *Vanitas still life* (fig. 12), where it serves to identify the painter as a producer of vanities and/or as

<sup>21</sup> I am grateful to Gloria Kury and Karen Fiss for sharing their thoughts on this picture and helping me to see and articulate many of the visual complexities of its commentary on the representational grasp of still-life painting.

<sup>22</sup> Cat. *Frans Halsmuseum*, Haarlem 1969, nr. 295. The portrait drawing depicted here is now in the Rijksprentenkabinet in Amsterdam. For a discussion of the drawing as an attribute of *vanitas* see Raupp, op. cit. (note 11), pp. 283–85.

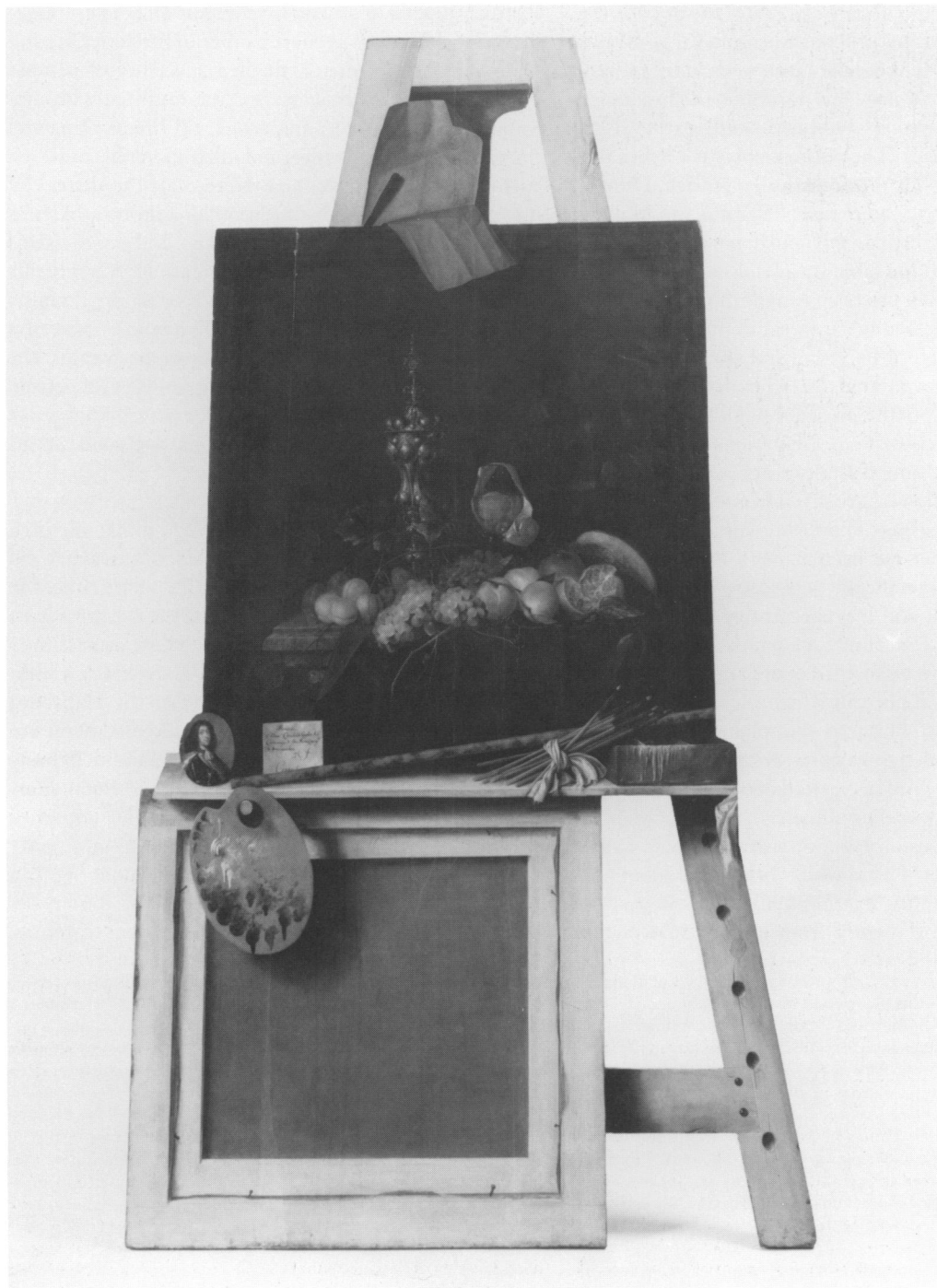
<sup>23</sup> Cat. *Schilderijen en tekeningen*, Leiden (Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal) 1983, nr. 409, with further literature. For a reading of this

the subject to whom the assembled objects refer.<sup>22</sup> He underscores the commemorative function of his self-portrait drawing by picturing it among objects which double as attributes of human endeavor and as emblems of transience and mortality. Though his depicted portrait may equivocate between its status as a vanity and a means of immortalizing the artist, as a pictorial commemoration it functions rather like the portrait print of Maarten Tromp, prominently displayed in a roughly contemporary still-life memorial to the Dutch naval hero by Pieter van Steenwijck (fig. 13) painted around 1656.<sup>23</sup> In van Steenwijck's picture, the admiral's life is summarized and stilled for contemplation through a similar collection of objects which, like the printed funeral oration at its center, allude to his valorous deeds and constitute both his public identity and the fame that keeps his memory alive.<sup>24</sup>

David Bailly uses a similar strategy to show how deceptive craft rather than martial conquests immortalize

picture which sees a paradoxical relationship between its commemorative and *vanitas* implications see de Jongh, op. cit. (note 17), pp. 222–29 (with further literature). See also Alpers, op. cit. (note 4), pp. 169–80, esp. p. 174.

<sup>24</sup> Van Steenwijck actually portrayed himself as a producer of this type of still life in a now destroyed picture which shows the painter at his easel, displaying the commemorative still life with depicted portrait on which he is working. The painting, formerly in Ypres, is illustrated in J. Michael Montias, *Vermeer and his milieu: a web of social history*, Princeton 1989, fig. 7.



14 Cornelis Gysbrechts, *Trompe-l'oeil easel*. Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst

the artist in his marvellous *Vanitas still life* of 1651 (fig. 3).<sup>25</sup> Bailly presents his self-portrait as one of an array of finely crafted self-referential objects—including several pictorial representations—and various emblems of mortality such as the soap bubbles, skull, extinguished candle and hourglass. The entire display is further captioned by way of an illusionistically rendered slip of paper inscribed with the phrase, “Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas.” Bailly conspicuously pairs this text, securely anchored to the table by a book, with the folded sheet beside it which has been caught in mid-air thanks to the painter’s art. Bailly’s interest in the transience of all that we see before us is beyond question. Yet, as Svetlana Alpers has pointed out in her discussion of this work, it is not simply the presence of all these emblems but their status as crafted representations which is significant here. For through Bailly’s artistry, the painted soap bubbles and flowers are saved from their own ephemerality, and the passage of time measured by the falling sand of the hourglass has been made to stand still. Bailly further creates a specifically self-referential illusion of making time stand still by representing himself at two different points in time: first, as a youth in the person of the young painter with maulstick in hand, and secondly in the depicted oval portrait which records his appearance in middle age. This apparent pictorial conquest of time is just one of the ways in which Bailly’s picture celebrates the power of his crafted deceptions even as he admits the fragility of their illusions.<sup>26</sup>

By way of conclusion I want to turn briefly to a third type of still-life self-image which brings the identification of self and art to its culmination in *trompe-l’oeil* performances like the work from around 1670 by the

Flemish painter Cornelis Gysbrechts (fig. 14).<sup>27</sup> Gysbrechts, who served as court painter to Frederick III and Christian V of Denmark, made a speciality of painted deceptions such as this ersatz easel, outfitted with pictorial counterfeits of a sumptuous still-life painting and the canvas, paints, brushes and other materials of which such illusions are fashioned. Here, it is the display of imitative virtuosity alone rather than a portrait likeness which comes to stand for the artist and serve as his principal means of self-representation. Gysbrechts further identifies himself as the *Contervijer*—literally: likeness-maker—to the King of Denmark by way of a letter addressed to himself which is propped against the still life just to the right of a portrait of his royal patron. Through this depicted text he celebrates his imitative skill with reference to the professional and social status which it brought him.

Samuel van Hoogstraeten took this strategy of self-representation a step farther, making similar pictorial deceptions central to the forging of his professional and social identity. He went on to valorize such artifices in his treatise on painting where he refers to the great honor and repute bestowed on painters whose artistry succeeded in deceiving princes.<sup>28</sup> Van Hoogstraeten himself had done precisely that in 1651 at the Habsburg court in Vienna, where he received a gold medallion and chain from Ferdinand III for deceiving and delighting the emperor with a *trompe-l’oeil* still life.<sup>29</sup> Soon afterwards he transformed the emperor’s honorarium into a personal trademark by incorporating it into witty *trompe-l’oeil* pieces like his feigned cabinet door (fig. 15), where the imperial medallion emerges coyly from behind a white towel, along with an assortment of gentle-

25 *Schilderijen en tekeningen*, cit. (note 23), nr. 1351. For key interpretative discussions of this picture and further literature see N. Popper-Voskuil, “Self-portraiture and vanitas still-life painting in 17th-century Holland in reference to David Bailly’s vanitas oeuvre,” *Pantheon* 31 (1973), pp. 58–74; Alpers, op. cit. (note 4), pp. 103–09; M. Wurfain, “David Bailly’s *Vanitas* of 1651,” *The age of Rembrandt: studies in seventeenth-century Dutch painting*, ed. Roland Fleischer and Susan Scott Munshower (Papers in Art History from the Pennsylvania State University), 1988, pp. 47–69; E.J. Sluijter, “‘Een volmaekte schildery is als een spiegel van de natuur: spiegel en spiegelbeeld in de Nederlandse schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw,’” in N. Brederoo, L.D. Couprie et al. (eds.), *Oog in oog met de spiegel*, Amsterdam 1988, pp. 146–63.

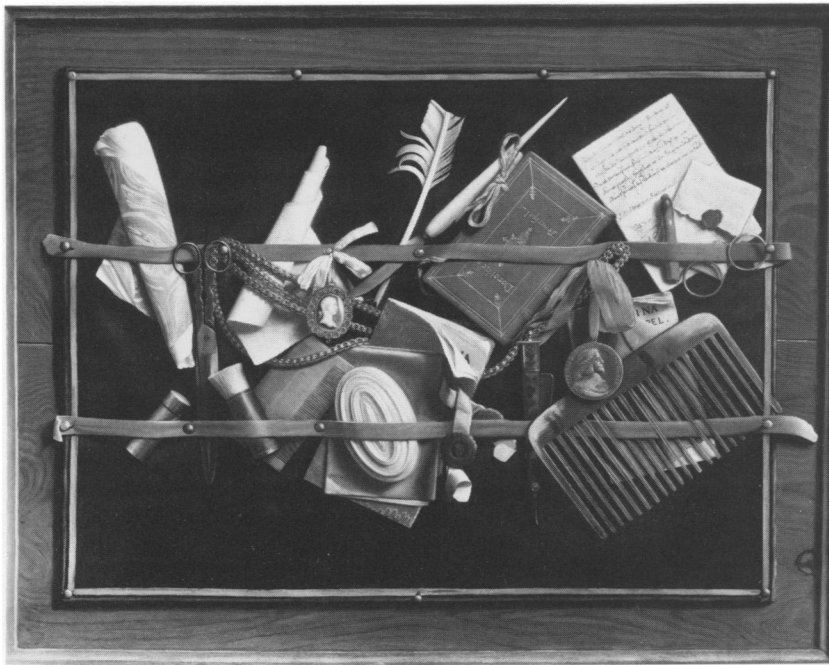
26 Wurfain, op. cit. (note 25), p. 53, finds implausible the identification of the young painter with Bailly, and proposes that the portrait is of the young Frans van Mieris. This suggestion seems to me to miss the point of Bailly’s dual self-representation. I am more inclined to

agree with Sluijter, op. cit. (note 25), who aptly links Bailly’s claim to manipulate time in his double self-image with Isaac van Swanenburg’s *Self-portrait* of 1568 (Leiden, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal), a picture which undoes temporality in the opposite direction by showing the artist painting his own portrait as he will appear in the future.

27 For literature on this picture see Poul Gammelbo, *Dutch still-life painting in Danish collections*, Copenhagen 1960, p. 166, nr. 255; and Jochen Becker, “Das Buch im Stilleben: das Stilleben im Buch,” in *Stilleben in Europa*, cit. (note 16), pp. 465–66. On the genre of *trompe-l’oeil* cut-outs, see Jacques Wilhelm, “Silhouettes and ‘Trompe-l’oeil’ cut-outs,” *Art Quarterly* 16 (1953), pp. 295–304.

28 See van Hoogstraeten, op. cit. (note 7), pp. 218, 275.

29 Arnold Houbraken, van Hoogstraeten’s pupil and first biographer, gives the fullest account of the pictorial coup which his teacher made central to his own personal mythology in *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, vol. 2, The Hague 1753, pp. 157–58.



16 Samuel van Hoogstraeten, *Feigned trompe-l'oeil still life*. Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle

manly accoutrements collected in a gilt leather comb case.<sup>30</sup> Van Hoogstraeten claims his ownership of these objects—and the social status they imply—as well as his identity as perpetrator of this deception by way of a painted receipt which reads, in translation: “Received by Samuel van Hoogstraeten the 12th of February 1655 in Vienna.” Here once again the artist disappears into his artistry. In his pictorial counterfeit of the brush, mirror, comb and other implements he uses to fashion his appearance, he plays the deceptive artifice of his pictorial image-making off that of his social image-making.

Van Hoogstraeten’s pictorial claims for his art are especially noteworthy in view of the fact that his success at court did not lead to a salaried appointment like that held by Gysbrechts. Instead he made it the cornerstone of a reputation which he parleyed into a successful career as a producer of pictures primarily for aristocratic and patrician clients in Holland and in England during the following two decades. During these years he continued to devise self-referential works which represent



15 Samuel van Hoogstraeten, *Trompe-l'oeil cabinet door*, 1655. Vienna, Akademie der Bildenden Künste

<sup>30</sup> See cat. *Gemälde aus dem Legat Wolfgang von Wurzbach*, Vienna (Akademie der Bildenden Künste) 1962, nr. 1406; de Jongh op. cit. (note 17), pp. 145–47; and W. Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler*, vol. 2, Landau/Pfaltz 1983, p. 1301, nr. 884.

the deceptive artifice of *trompe-l'oeil* as a means of social self-advancement. He took this idea to its limit in his remarkable painted counterfeit of a *trompe-l'oeil* painting, now in Karlsruhe (fig. 16).<sup>31</sup> In this work he features his gold medallion (with its conspicuously long and costly gold chain) among a collection of personal possessions, which appear to be affixed like so many trophies of his achievements, to a board with leather straps. Among them are writing implements, books that he wrote, gentlemanly accoutrements such as the large tortoiseshell wig comb of the type presented to dignitaries, a document with a green seal bearing his coat of arms, a letter sealed with his monogram and a poem written by the Austrian collector Johann Wilhelm von Stubenberg, praising van Hoogstraeten's painted deceptions. Through this assemblage van Hoogstraeten claims his status as a man of letters and recipient of the fame, gain and honor which were seen as the rewards of artistic excellence. What is most notably absent, of course, from this assemblage of the aggregated marks of his social and professional identity are the tools of his trade as painter. In place of these professional attributes he has given us a demonstration of the deceptive artistry that earned him honor at court. He further proclaims the supremacy of that artistry by way of the poem at the upper right which chastises those viewers who wrongly think that Zeuxis' mastery, which fooled birds with painted grapes, could not be surpassed. According to von Stubenberg, they need only look at van Hoogstraeten to see the artistry that made the emperor of the whole world fall prey to a similar deceit.<sup>32</sup> Van Hoogstraeten's use of this self-referential testimonial to his talents recalls Anthonis Mor's inclusion in his Uffizi *Self-portrait* of the Lampsonius poem comparing him-

self to Apelles. Yet van Hoogstraeten uses this device to make even bolder assertions about his own status and that of his art. Unlike Mor, he claims not only to have outdone an ancient paragon of painting, but also to have outwitted the world's most powerful ruler. What is most significant here is that van Hoogstraeten grounds these assertions of supreme artistry in the illusionistic virtuosity with which he quite literally identifies.

With van Hoogstraeten's self-promoting pictorial performances of the 1660s and 1670s, we have come a long way from Clara Peeters's comparatively impersonal self-reflections of the 1610s. Yet despite their shifting emphases—from the power and pleasures of surrogate possession, to the fantasy of stilling time and life, to the performance of self in praiseworthy deceptions—all these works implicate the artist's representation of self within celebrations of painting's representational craft. By analyzing the ways in which these pictures call attention at one and the same time to their own status as representations and to the professional identities of their makers, I have tried to reveal something of the complex interplay of artistic, social and moral concerns informing these self-images. In doing so I can only hope to have raised more questions about these richly self-reflexive works than I have answered. For I believe that these artists sought less to communicate a simple message that we must decipher than to evoke in us the kind of curious, patient and virtually insatiable visual desire that compels us to contemplate and to savor the artistry which their stilled lives so ingeniously display.

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<sup>31</sup> Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle, inv. nr. 2620. See *150 Gemälde*, cit. (note 8), p. 130; Lauts, op. cit. (note 8), pp. 30–36; and Becker, op. cit. (note 27), pp. 466–69; and Sumowski, op. cit. (note 30), p. 1302, nr. 885.

<sup>32</sup> The verse reads: "Ihr die [ihr?] zweyfelt dass des Zeuxis Meisterhand/ Die Vögel hab geteuscht durch flache farben-trauben,/ Dass Ihm die Meisterschaft ein Edler streyd [?] kont rauben/ Durch Zärttern Pinsels fleiss und weisses Mal-gewand/ Kommt schaut den Hoochstract an!/ Der Herrscher aller Weltt/ Durch seines Pinsels Kunst in gleichen irthum fällt./ J.W. Herr von Stoeberberch, Wien

16.." [You who doubt that Zeuxis' masterful hand, which has fooled birds with flat grapes made of colored pigments, could be robbed of its mastery in a nobler contest, through finer handling of the brush and white canvas, come look at van Hoogstraeten. Through the art of his brush the ruler of the whole world has likewise been deceived./ J.W. Herr von Stubenberg, Vienna 16.]. The author, Johan Wilhelm von Stubenberg (1619–63), an Austrian noble active at the court of Ferdinand III, belonged to the influential German literary society known as the Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft.