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PIETER CLAESZ

Berchem c. 1597 – Haarlem 1660

A Toebackje: a Still Life with a Berkemeier, Matches, clay Pipes, a Tobacco Box, and a Brazier.

Oil on Panel, 28.2 x 45.7 cm

Signed in monogram and dated lower left: *PC 1638*



Provenance: Private collection, England;
Amsterdam, D. Komter Gallery, 1921;
Amsterdam, Bernard Houthakker Gallery;
Dieren, D. Katz Gallery, by 1931;
New York, art market;
Wassenaar, collection Sidney J. van den Bergh, until 1975;
With Hans Cramer, The Hague;
Private collection, New York;
Private collection, Belgium, from 2006 until 2020.

Literature: H.P. Bremmer, in: *Beeldende Kunst*, vol. IX.3, 1922, no. 19, ill. (as dated 1633);
A.P.A. Vorenkamp, *Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van het Hollandsch stilleven in de zeventiende eeuw* (diss. Leiden), 1933, p. 32, note 1 (as dated 1633);
N.R.A. Vroom, *De Schilders van het Monochrome Banketje*, Amsterdam, 1945, pp. 23, 42, 43 (fig. 30), 104 (fig. 87), 199, no. 34 (as dated 1633);
I. Bergström, *Studier i Holländisdkit Stillebenmalerei under 1600-Talet*, Göteborg 1947, p. 128 (as dated 1633);
I. Bergström, *Dutch Still-Life painting in the Seventeenth Century*, London 1956, p. 122 fig. 15 p. 305 (as dated 1633);
A.B. de Vries, *Verzameling Sidney J. van den Bergh*, Wassenaar 1968, no. 40 pp. 40-41, ill. (as dated 1638);
N.R.A. Vroom, *A modest message as intimated by the painters of the "Monochrome Banketje"*, Schiedam 1980, Vol. 1, pp. 36, 117, fig. 39, 156, Vol. 2, no. 84 p.24 (as dated 1638);
A.W. Lowenthal, 'Pieter Claesz,' in: J. Turner (ed.), *The Dictionary of Art*, London/New York, 1996, p. 369;
M. Brunner-Bulst, 'Pieter Claesz. The Rediscovery of the Painter and His Origins,' in: *Pieter Claesz. Master of Haarlem Still Life*, Zwolle 2004, p. 52.;
M. Brunner-Bulst, *Pieter Claesz., der Hauptmeister des Haarlemer Stillebens im 17. Jahrhundert*, 2004, pp. 252-53, cat. no. 86, ill.;

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H. Grootenboer, *The Rhetoric of Perspective. Realism and Illusionism in Seventeenth Century Dutch Still-Life Painting*, Chicago, 2005, pp. 75-76, fig. 6.

Exhibited: Dieren, Kunsthandel D. Katz, 1937, *16e en 17e eeuwse Hollandsche schilderijen*, cat. no. 14 (as dated 1635);
Delft, Museum Het Prinsenhof, 1952/53, *Nederlandse meesters uit particulier bezit*, cat. no. 12 (as dated 1633);
Laren, Singer Museum, 1959, *Kunstschatten. Twee Nederlandse collecties schilderijen ...*, cat. no. 37 (as dated 1633);
Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum, 1962, *Nederlandse stillevens uit de zeventiende eeuw*, cat. no. 34 (as dated 1633);
Leiden, Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal, 1965, *17e eeuwse meesters uit Nederlands particulier bezit*, cat. no. 11 (as dated 1633);
Bucharest, Muzeul de Artă al Republicii Socialiste România, 1972, *Olandezul la el acasă și în lume*, p. 89 ;
New York, National Academy of Design, 1988, *Dutch and Flemish Paintings from New York Private Collections*, cat. no. 12, p. 44, ill.;
Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum, Zürich, Kunsthhaus, Washington, National Gallery of Art, 2004-2005, *Pieter Claesz. Master of Haarlem Still Life*, cat. no. 30, p. 74, ill., pp. 52, 123.

Pieter Claesz spent his entire career in Haarlem, where he specialized in still-life paintings. Well over 100 works survive, dating from 1621 to 1660. Most of his pictures are dated and monogrammed *PC*. Since those initials were shared by the Antwerp still-life painter Clara Peeters, some attributions are disputed.

Claesz's depictions of modest objects arranged on a table-top exemplify the development of Dutch still-life painting in the 17th century. Early in his career he was an outstanding exponent of the monochromatic still life, which echoed the tonal landscapes produced by contemporary Haarlem landscape painters. Claesz employed colour schemes unified by a predominating neutral tone, typically favouring warm browns, golds and olive greens, which he sparked with the yellows and reds of fruits or contrasted with the cool greys of silver and pewter. He experimented with both daylight and candlelight, often causing a shadow to fall diagonally on the background wall. Claesz's earliest known work, *Still Life with a Stoneware Jug* (1621, England, private collection),¹ is a 'breakfast piece' (*ontbijtje*) in the manner of the slightly earlier Haarlem still-life painters Nicolaes Gillis, Floris van Dyck and Floris van Schooten. Bowls of fruits and berries, wine and olives are arranged at regular intervals beside a jug on a white damask tablecloth, in a compositional type that is usually termed 'additive'. Local

¹ Brunner-Bulst, op. cit., p. 206, no. 1.

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colour is strong and the viewpoint high, so as to invite inspection of the deliberately placed objects, hardly any of which overlap. Already, however, Claesz's distinctive character is revealed in the unifying atmosphere, the convincing illusionism, and the sense of space created by the diagonal arrangement.

The intimate grouping of fewer objects in a simple monumental design typifies Claesz's mature or middle period. His remarkably simple compositions of the 1630s and 1640s are tightly knit and ingeniously, yet naturally, constructed, often around a dominating formal motif, such as the fanning diagonals in the present painting. His works of this period often resemble those of his Haarlem colleague Willem Claesz. Heda in subject matter, composition and monochromatic harmony, but Heda characteristically preferred cooler, more luminous effects captured with exceptional refinement. Claesz's technique is sometimes meticulous, as in the *Still Life with a Turkey Pie* (1627, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum),² and sometimes vigorously free, as in the *Breakfast Piece with a Ham* (1643, Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts).³ He often painted *vanitas* still lifes, with skulls, hourglasses and guttering flames that invite meditation on transience and death (for example The Hague, Mauritshuis). His breakfast pieces probably also have loosely constructed symbolic programmes, with complex meanings centred on the temptations of earthly goods. For example, wine might suggest the Eucharist, but it also connoted pleasurable indulgence and even drunkenness. Thus the viewer could contemplate the relative merit of spiritual and worldly values, an activity pertinent to Calvinist-dominated Dutch mercantile society.

In contrast to his earlier sober style and restrained palette, many of Claesz's late paintings depict luxurious displays with bright colours and grand compositional rhythms. *Still Life with a Basket of Grapes and a Crab* (1651, present whereabouts unknown),⁴ in which Claesz probably collaborated with Roelof Koets (?1592-1655), is a representative example.

In the past, the date on the present painting has been often misread as 1633, even though the last digit is clearly an '8'. This may have been due to the presence of surface dirt in the past, or to a dark and discolored varnish; however, stylistically and in view of its composition, the present work is closer to Claesz's still lifes from the early 1630s than to those from the late 1630s and early 1640s. The present painting is especially related to the 1632 dated *Still Life with Smoking Utensils and a Berkemeyer* (private collection), which has identical and similar objects arranged into a slightly different composition.⁵ Another related work is the *Still Life with Smoking Utensils and a Glass of Beer* (private collection), of which the date should be read as 1633, and which has a similar horizontal format.⁶

² Brunner-Bulst, op. cit., p. 218, no. 26, ill.

³ Brunner-Bulst, op. cit., p. 272, no. 118, ill.

⁴ Brunner-Bulst, op. cit., p. 318, no. 193, ill.

⁵ Brunner-Bulst, op. cit., p. 237, no. 57, ill.

⁶ Brunner-Bulst, op. cit., p. 237, no. 59, ill.