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Galería de Arte

Soraya Cartategui

Dear friends,

For this month of April we have chosen this incredible still life made by Floris van Schooten, a Dutch painter specializing in this genre.

Best wishes,
Soraya Cartategui



Floris van Schooten

(c. ? 1590 ca. – Haarlem after 1653)

“A breakfast piece with cheese, bread, fruit and roemer, on a partially draped table”

Oil on panel

54 cm x 90,8 cm. (21,25 x 35,74 in.)

Floris van Schooten was one of the seventeenth-century Dutch artists with the

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huge figures represented in them. When we look at his works, we discover an artist who often repeats the same model of kitchen interiors with still lifes, full of all kinds of products such as: fish, fruits and different dishes. Throughout his career he made numerous still lifes with monochromatic backgrounds, reaching more than a hundred between 1617 and 1644, much to the liking of the Dutch Golden Age. This type of compositions, called "ontbijtjes" or "served tables", presented a series of foods on a table as a snack and was very demanded at the time. His compositions, despite being quite austere, manage to combine perfectly the still life, the interiors and the interaction of different characters, paying special attention to the effects of light and his careful way of painting the tablecloths. His still lifes with fruits and ceramics are easily confused with those of Floris van Dyck while the figures depicted in his works are, in some cases, portraits of girls or boys very similar to those made by P. C. van Ryck. It is very frequent that his works appear signed with the FvS monogram, in an unusual place for it, as is the center of the painting.

In Netherlands, during the seventeenth century, the paintings that represented still lifes of tables served with various food and beautiful objects were denominated as "ontbijtjes". In this century, this type of representations was very important and this caused the emergence of great artists specializing in this "ontbijtjes", such as Floris van Schooten. The manifestation in the painting of still lifes developed vividly in Netherlands in the late sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth century, an era characterized by economic revolutions and an incipient dissolution of feudal structures in various domains of life. The theme of these tables can be interpreted as an index of a new economic-social situation. The still lifes were highly appreciated paintings in the seventeenth century, and in fact will come to generate a large market for the commercialization of art that will participate with interest the whole society coming to admire both less affluent homes and in the mansions of the upper bourgeoisie and aristocracy.

The compositions of tables covered by delicacies and objects were not painted as mere copies of a group of objects placed randomly, they were compositions studied in detail piece by piece. The shape, the stage and the ingredients become part of an authentic "portrait" of the table that is also illuminated by a light blow that passes through the window and makes the metal objects shine in which they are reflected in turn, as in a mirror, the elements that give life to the painting. In the numerous and diverse representations of the "ontbijtjes" we find certain elements that are repeated frequently, which symbolize the values of the society of that time. Our table presents different foods, made very carefully and studying their location well. Contrary to what one might think, the work not only shows us the rich meats that Schooten wants to share with us, but each of these elements has a meaning. All the pieces are presented on a table whose wood is fused with the monochromatic color of the background. This range of colors ranging from black to ocher, through brown and yellow pigments, contrasts with the spotless white linen tablecloth that partially dresses the table. In this sense, Schooten demonstrates all his mastery when making the folds and

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The element that stands out in the entire composition are the three cheeses superimposed one on top of the other presented on a pewter plate. The technical quality of Schooten is evident in the detail of the reflection of the cheese on the edge of the wide plate.



We know that cheese was a very common food among the poorer classes while at the tables of the most distinguished people it was only served as a dessert; In fact, the doctor Johan van Benerwijck published a work in 1636 recommending salt to open the stomach and cheese to close it; and currently many Dutch families are still finishing their breakfast in this way. But like most of the elements of a still life, cheese also has a deeper meaning; for the Protestant tradition it is a fast dish, showing in this mode modesty and not gluttony that would amount to greed while for Christians it symbolizes the body of Christ.



Both cheese and butter were among the most exported products from Netherlands during this period. On this occasion, Schooten again surprised us by making with great detail the lines that the knife has left in the butter.

It is also worth highlighting the dish on which he presents it, a bowl of Wan-li china, referring to the thirteenth emperor of the Ming Dynasty (1572 - 1620). As we can see, in this case the still life allows us to know not only what were the elements that were usually consumed in Netherlands at this time, but also shows us the importance of trade between Holland and Asia during these years. After the plate with butter Schooten presents us a bread because during this time they were a very important part of the daily diet of Netherlands. Bread was present in all the meals of the day, complementing the main course and for this reason they are always represented in the still lifes or in the genre scenes.

Among the cheeses and butter with the bread we find a *roemer* glass that will be very common in the Dutch still lifes of the

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Romans were the ones who initially brought the first vines of grape to Germany. However, it could also be referring to the custom of the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire who use this type of glasses to toast.

Today, this type of glass is still used to make a toast as part of the tradition but over the years have evolved aesthetically and have become increasingly sophisticated. Our glass is composed of a spiral base of fused glass threads, which then is joined to a thick glass stem decorated with raspberries that allow the cup to be better held. As we can see, inside it has white wine which, in this case, is an allegory of the Eucharist and the blood of Christ. In the still lifes, the glass of these glasses also served as an excuse for the artist to paint the reflection of the room in which the still life was located, as a camouflaged view inside the main painting.



On the left side of the composition we find some pears arranged in a porcelain bowl with a decoration very similar to the bowl that contained the butter. In front of the pears we can see several hazelnuts scattered across the table that would be referring to death on the cross of Christ and a couple of loaves, one of them on a pewter plate like the one of the cheeses.

It should be noted the way in which the artist places the bread, the handle of the knife and the plate protruding from the edge of the table, thus achieving an incredible depth effect as it gives the impression that the viewer could take the handle of the knife if he or she wish.

On the other side we differentiate a closed walnut, a food with a great symbolic load because on the one hand it represents the Holy Trinity, for the three parts in which it is divided: the shell, the fruit and the piece of wood that divides it; while on the other hand, the fruit itself symbolizes Jesus Christ.

Right next to the nut we see a new porcelain bowl with decorations in blue with fruits inside that look like strawberries or gooseberries. The first would allude to salvation while the second

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baked bread, twisted in a loop that could be in different flavors such as almond or garlic, among others, and whose origin would be in Germany.



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PROVENANCE

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MUSEUM

Schooten's works can be found in many museums around the world including: Antwerp- Fine Arts Royal Museum, Arnhem- Gemeentemuseum, Cambridge Fitzwilliam Museum, Copenhagen- Fine Arts Royal Museum, Dusseldorf- Kunstmuseum, Glasgow Art Gallery, Haarlem- Frans Hals Museum, Hoorn- Westfries Museum, London Mansion House, Manchester City Art Gallery, Otterlo-Rijksmuseum Kroller Muller.

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