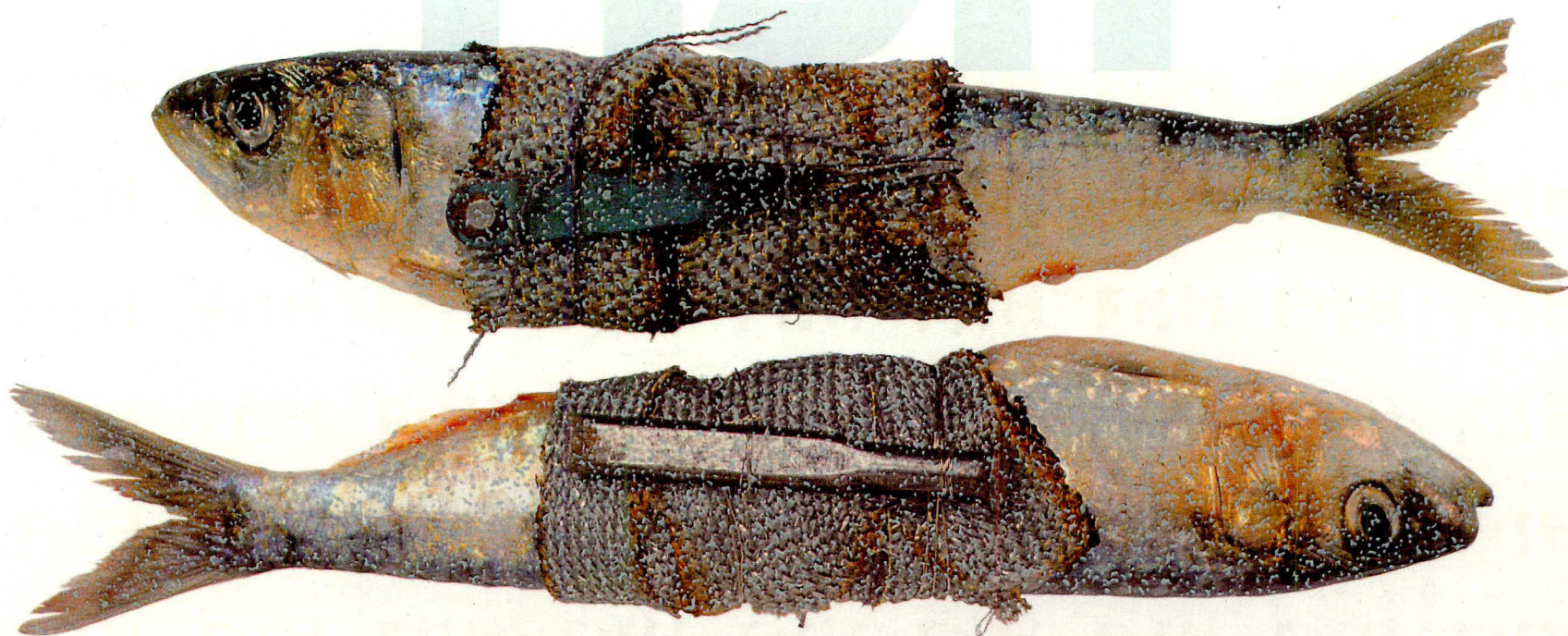




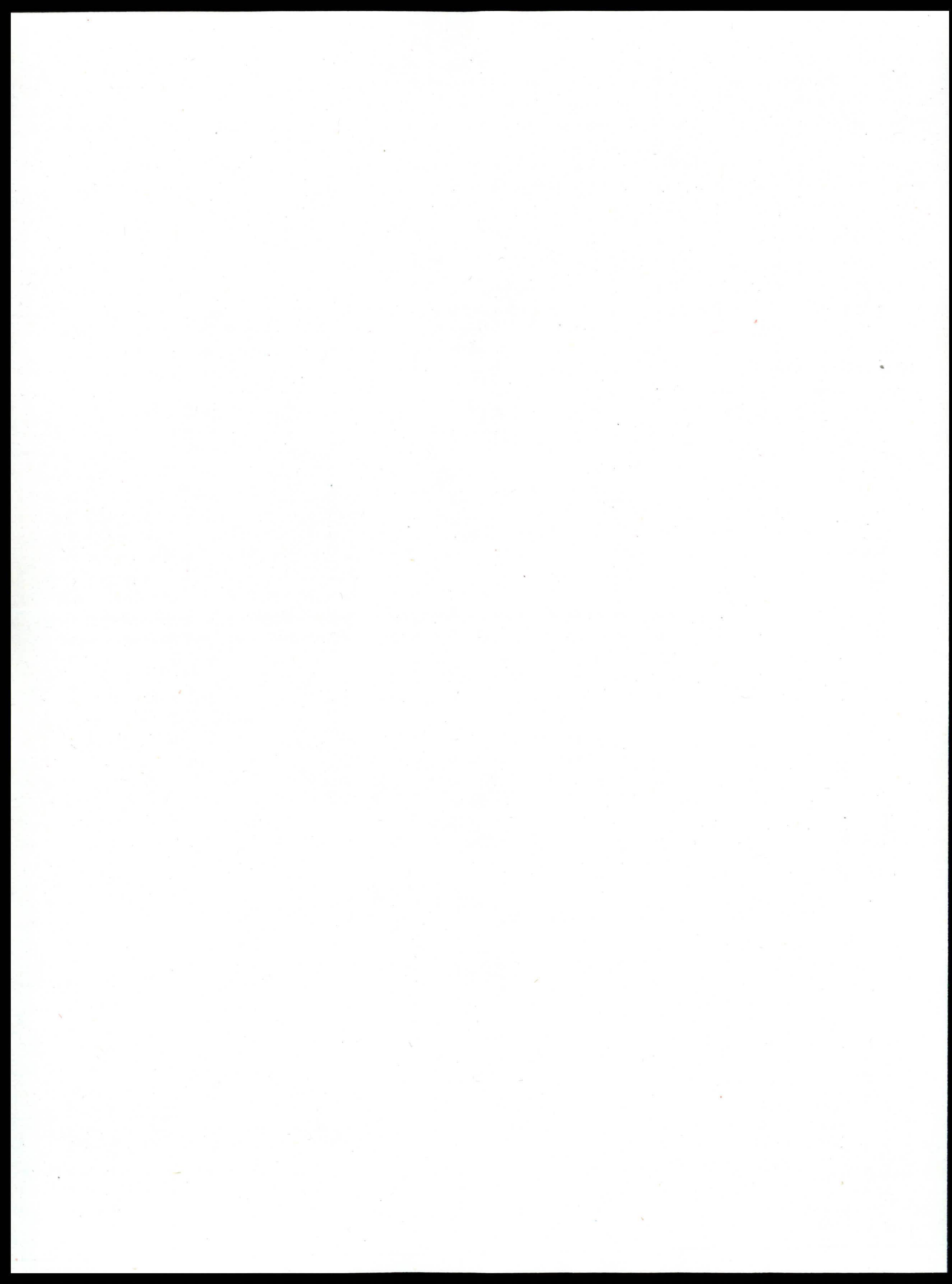
still lifes
by Dutch and Flemish
masters
1550-1700

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and
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FISH

central
museum





FISH

This publication was made possible by the Victor Heiloo Foundation

FISH

Still lifes by Dutch
and Flemish masters 1550-1700

*concept
and editing*

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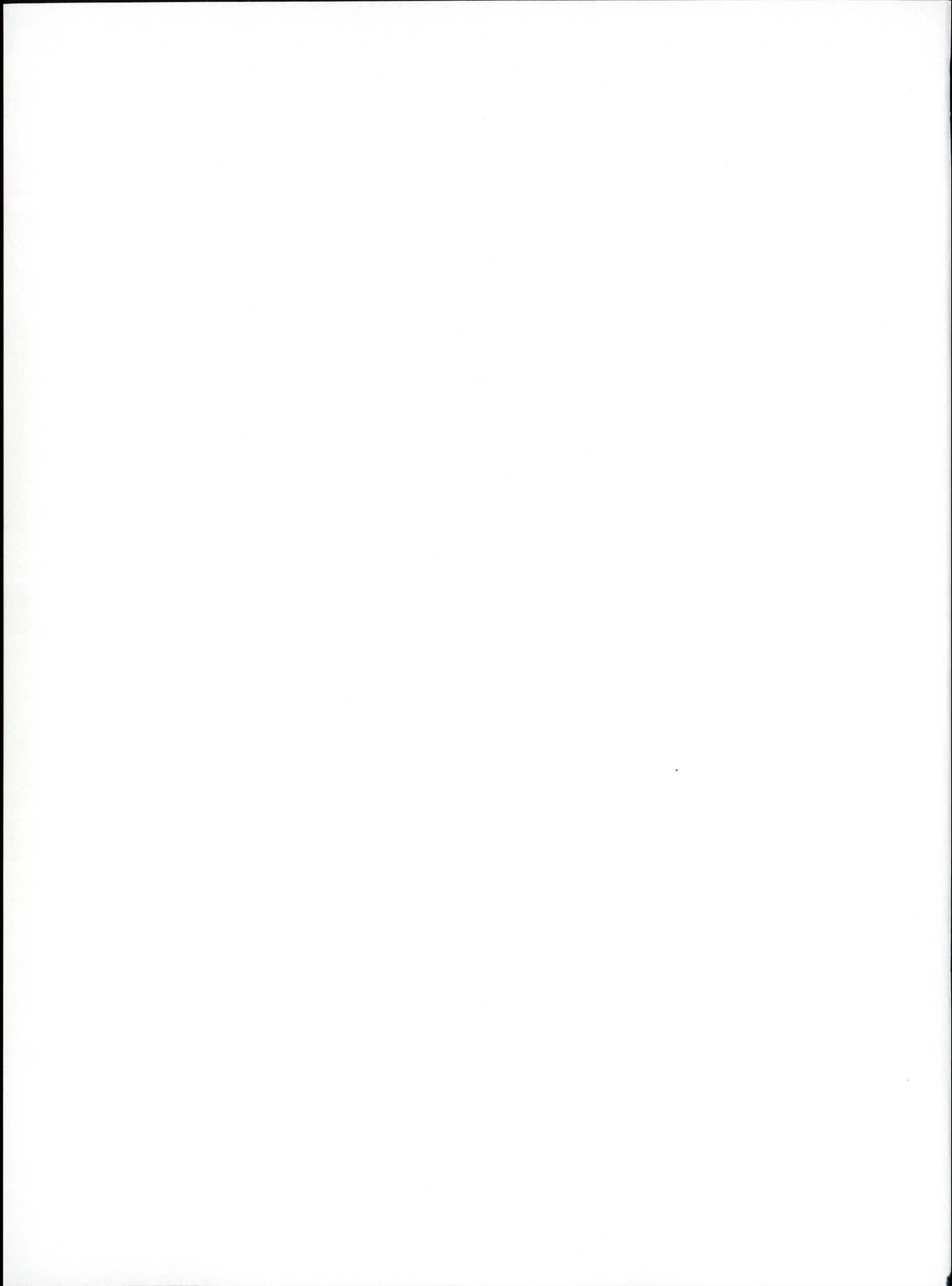
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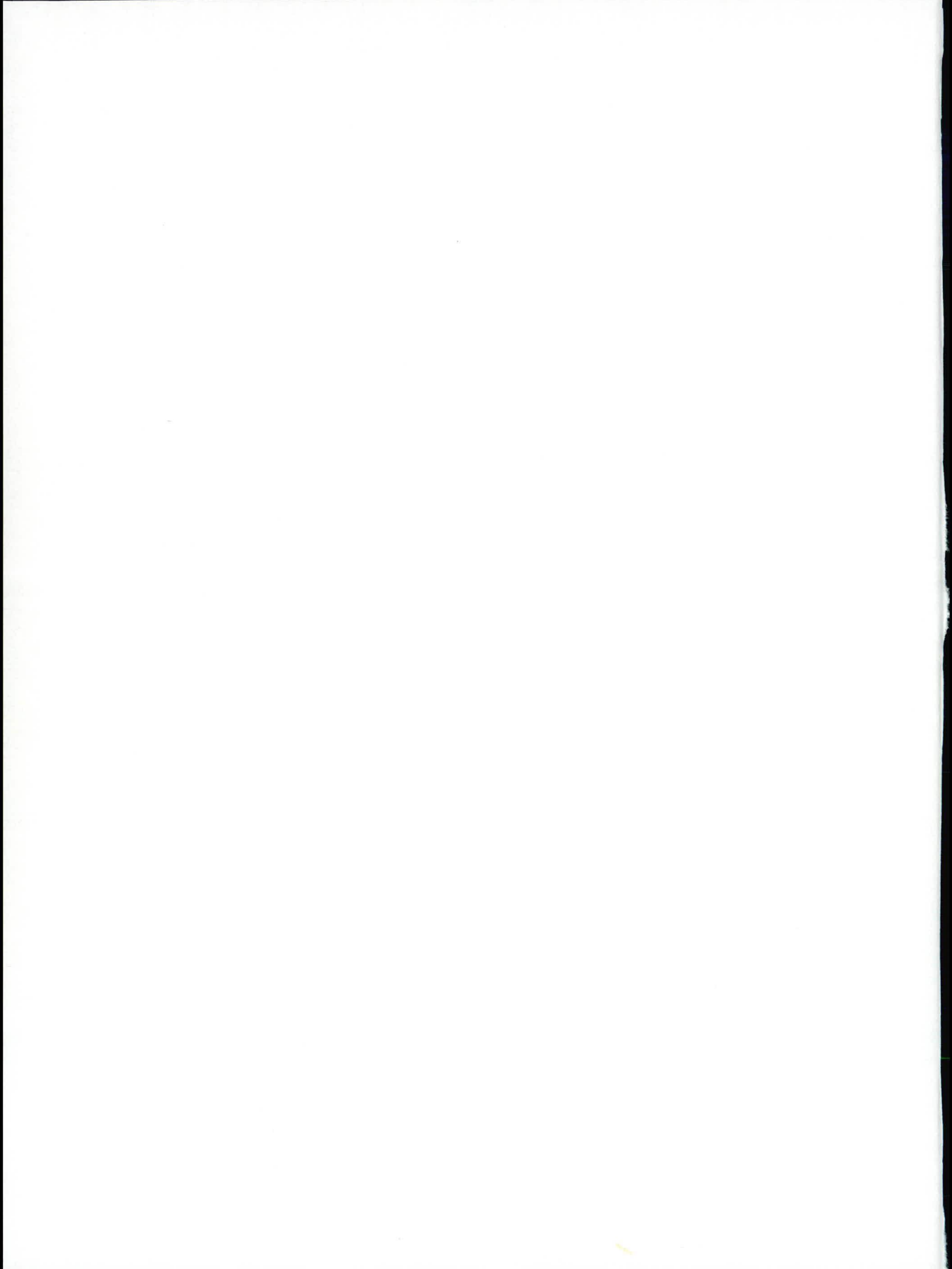
Carel Richter

Johanna Maria van Winter

CENTRAAL MUSEUM
UTRECHT 2004



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FOREWORD

Sjarel Ex and Liesbeth M. Helmus

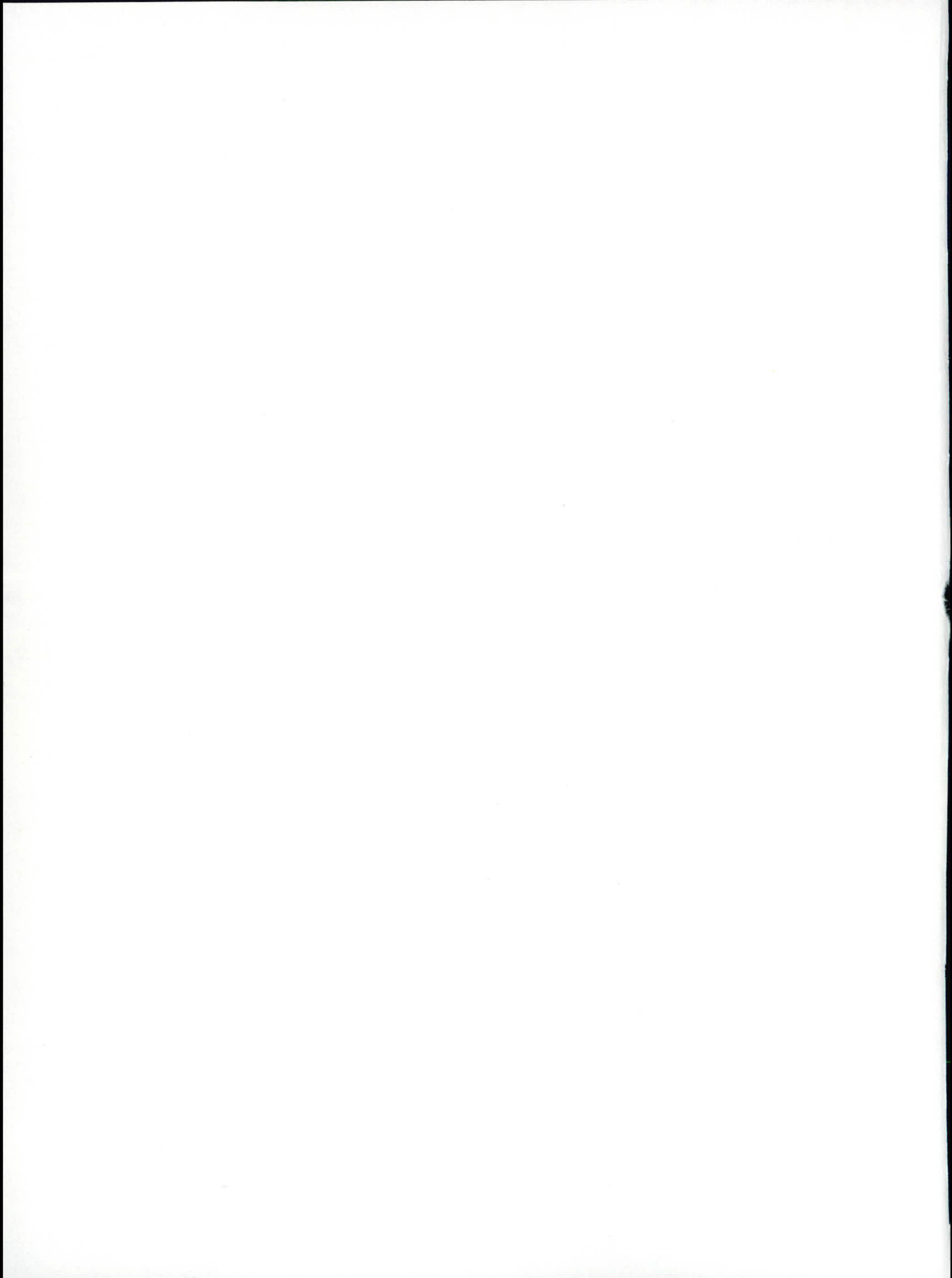
It is a unique experience to stand before the intense, raw works of Joachim Beuckelaer and Frans Snijders in Antwerp, to observe a balanced and serene fish still life by Clara Peeters in the Prado in Madrid, and to relish the texture and composition of a refined fish painting by Jacob Gillig in Utrecht. Several years ago the idea was born to organise an exhibition devoted to fish, that is still lifes of fish. This genre also flourished in Utrecht in the seventeenth century, but somehow has never been the focus of particular attention: a forgotten theme, one reserved for connoisseurs and a handful of passionate collectors, and certainly never as popular as still lifes of flowers by far. Following extensive investigation by us and our Finnish colleague Kai Kartio at the Amos Anderson Art Museum in Helsinki, more than 60 paintings from mostly foreign collections were selected in a productive and stimulating collaborative process. They are the most ravishing fish still lifes in Europe and the exhibition marks the first time that a Dutch museum features the subject on such a large scale.

Internationally, fish symbolises prosperity, creation and happiness. In the Netherlands, however, fish is usually negatively profiled in the press. Stories in the past months include reports on the fishing sector emptying out the North Sea, the minister negotiating the catch quota and eel dying out at a rapid pace. This suggests that fish is of interest solely in economic terms, and only begs ecological rescue. Fish, though, has been intertwined with Dutch culture for centuries. It is rich in symbolism, and is a subject to which scholars and authors can give full rein to their imagination, fish – freshwater and saltwater, swimming and lying on our plates – is a sensual and great aesthetic pleasure. With the descriptions of the 50 original species occurring in the Netherlands, their manner of preparation in former times and the rich artistic and art-historical reservoir of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century fish still lifes, our great cultural alliance with fish is presented for the first time in this exhibition and scholarly publication.

We are extremely grateful that from Naples to Madrid, Vienna to Scandinavia, and closer to home also Dordrecht and Hoorn, museums and particularly private individuals were willing to lend so many distinguished works of art to our exhibition. Thanks are owed to antiquarian Carel Richter for making available works from his dazzling collection of fish books and for his stimulating contribution to this project. The authors of the scholarly catalogue added a special dimension to the realisation of the exhibition and together produced a wide-ranging and exciting book. Special gratitude is owed Fred G. Meijer, who was released from his duties at the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD) for months in order to complete his work as main author and as advisor to the exhibition. Finally, we are indebted to the Victor Heiloo Foundation for its generous contribution allowing the catalogue to be published in both Dutch and English.

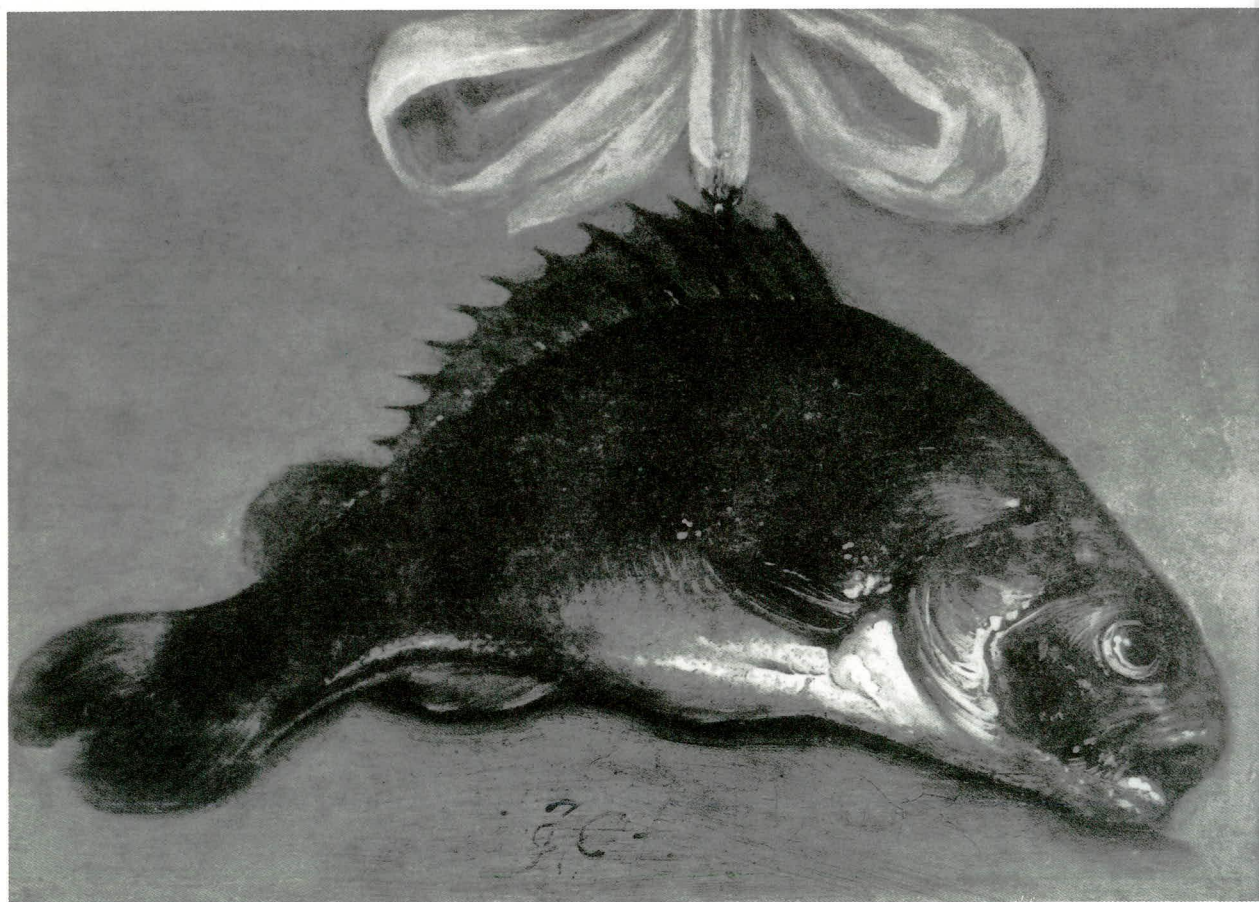
Sjarel Ex Director

Liesbeth M. Helmus Curator of Fine Arts prior to 1850



**FISH STILL LIVES
IN HOLLAND AND FLANDERS**

Fred G. Meijer



Judging solely on the basis of the number of fish still lifes produced, it is clear that the genre achieved its greatest popularity in the Northern Netherlands in the third quarter of the seventeenth century, while the interest in such still lifes in Flanders had already begun to wane by mid-century. The aim of this essay is to chart the development of the fish still life in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century, touching upon several production-related aspects, and to forward some general observations and conclusions.

WHY STILL LIFES OF FISH?

The development of still-life painting as a 'new' genre began in the early seventeenth century. Its origins can best be explained as the result of a confluence of circumstances. The changing economy, for instance, led to the emergence of new clienteles for paintings. These new buyers were interested in a far broader range of subject matter than the religious images that had previously constituted the majority of painting production. The growing fascination with botany and natural history and the ever-expanding geographical horizon engendered by the voyages of discovery and overseas trade also impacted the choice of subject matter in painting. The market for paintings blossomed and by extension so did the number of painters, many of whom began to specialise further.

As we shall see, the first fish still lifes were generated within the allegorical context of the Four Elements. Fish markets proved to be an apt representation of the element of Water, and these images soon evolved into true fish still lifes. They subsequently extricated themselves from their allegorical contexts to become an independent genre.

The development of the fish still life, though, was not a fluid, uninterrupted process. In the 1620s the genre was nearing extinction, when the production of fish still lifes had virtually ground to a halt. In the 1630s, however, both in Antwerp and in the north, increasing numbers of fish still lifes were being painted and especially in the provinces of Holland and Utrecht the genre evolved into a full-fledged member of the still-life family.

In 1676, the Hague fish still-life painter Isaac van Duijnen was visited by Master Van der Does, a treasurer, who announced that he had recently purchased 'such a wonderful painting' by the artist.¹ Seventeenth-century documents mentioning the acquisition of fish still lifes are exceedingly rare, as are contemporary comments having to do with their appreciation. However, judging from the large extant number of fish still lifes from the period, they definitely aroused the interest of the art buying public.

Inventories of the time reveal that Van der Does was not the only Hague dignitary who cared to own a fish still life by Van Duijnen. Among the nine paintings listed in the 1672 inventory of Pieter Rietvelt, clerk at the High Court, is a fish still life by Van Duijnen, and in 1681 Willem Boers, concierge to Prince William of Orange, also owned such a work. Inventoried in 1688, the estate of another of the prince's employees, Adriaen Manteau, likewise includes a 'fish piece by Van Duijnen'.² What emerges from these seventeenth-century inventories is the great variety of people who actually possessed fish still lifes. They hung in the homes of wine merchants, innkeepers, potters, booksellers, tax collectors as well as the captain of a man-of-war. Nevertheless, most of these individuals had no more than one or two in their collection, collections, incidentally, that differed significantly in scope and size. For example, the above-mentioned sea captain, Adriaen van den Bosch, owned primarily Italian landscapes and still lifes of flowers and fruit. The few marine paintings and the single still life of fish by Abraham van Beijeren that he possessed fail to characterise his collection as an obvious one for a sea-faring professional. The painting collection of Miss Maria van Nes of The Hague, however, was exceptional in that when it was inventoried in 1663 it comprised no less than five fish still lifes by (Pieter) de Putter and three seascapes, two of which by (Willem) van Diest.

Biographical references have been omitted here when they have been included in the *Compendium*, pp. 393-429. Several less prominent artists are sometimes here discussed in greater detail than other, more important masters whose work occurs in the catalogue, pp. 210-346, where they are treated more elaborately.

I am grateful to Veronique Biere, Sabine Giepmans, Liesbeth Helmus, Maggie Rochelle and especially Charles Dumas and Margreet Wolters for having read and commented on earlier versions of this essay. Caroline Breedveld kindly allowed me to consult her 1995 thesis for the University of Amsterdam, *De oorsprong van het visstilleven in de Nederlanden van de 17de eeuw* (The origins of the fish still life in the Netherlands of the 17th century). Many of her observations and conclusions concur with the results of my own research.

¹ For the anecdote – the painting proved to be a work by one of Van Duijnen's pupils – see p. 72. The subject of the painting is not mentioned in Abraham Bredius' archival note at the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD) in The Hague, which transcribes the essential part of the notarial deed concerning the matter drawn up by notary G. Valette in The Hague on 5 July 1676. For the sake of argument, and because fish were the main subject of Van Duijnen as well as his pupils and followers, I assume that the painting was a fish still life. Unfortunately, Bredius' archival note does not mention a first name or initial of the treasurer.

² These paintings, as well as the works cited below, are mentioned in inventories and other documents, excerpts of which are found in Abraham Bredius' archival notes in the RKD, under the heading 'Oud Hollandse Kunstinventarissen' (Old Dutch Art Inventories), which are indexed by owners and artists' names.

Apparently, it attracted enough buyers to allow a steady parade of fish still-life painters the opportunity of developing and marketing their art.

While the appeal of other types of still lifes must have been related – at least partially – to their (symbolic) connotations, this can hardly have been the case for the fish still life. Floral still lifes, for example, owed their popularity to the growing interest in botany, their *vanitas* connotation, and certainly their audience's sheer delight in their aesthetic beauty. Above all, they could be regarded as exalting the diversity of God's creation. Game still lifes exuded an air of luxury due to the class-connected restrictions surrounding hunting. However, despite the wealth of symbolism that surrounded fish in other contexts, not much more symbolism than the underlying allegory of Water can be imputed to fish still lifes proper.³ Yet the fish still life, too, could be perceived as praising Creation and in that context as an image of God's reward to those folk toiling by the sea.⁴

Naturally, fish played a crucial role in the diet of the Dutch population, as well as in the Dutch economy. It has been suggested that the economic importance of fish – with herring fishery leading the way – must have served as a main incentive for painting fish still lifes.⁵ Nevertheless, there is little to no evidence that these images were specifically purchased, let alone collected, by individuals involved in the fish trade or in shipping and navigation. Although they were sometimes hung in kitchens, fish still lifes seem to have been valued principally for their pictorial and decorative qualities.

Like the majority of seventeenth-century paintings, fish still lifes do not present what the painter actually observed while painting them. Rather, they display a seeming reality and were usually composed on the basis of preliminary studies and sketches of individual fish or small groups of fish. This working method enabled the painter to devise the most appealing and convincing possible composition as well as take the necessary time executing it. Working in oil paint is time consuming – the paint dries slowly and a completed painting consists of several layers. Not to be forgotten is the fact that an actual arrangement of fish would have rotten long

³ See Eddy de Jongh's essay in this catalogue, pp. 75-119.

⁴ See Gobin 1989, pp. 48-56. With thanks to Charles Dumas for this reference.

⁵ In her thesis Caroline Breedveld investigated the origins of the fish still life (see note 2). She correctly ruled out the influence of several sources, such as emblems and graphic art, as the immediate incentives for painters of fish still lifes. She concluded that the interest in such paintings was primarily socio-economic in nature, adding that symbolism in these painting is all but absent and that they must have been appreciated primarily for their decorative qualities.

before the painter could finish the painting in all its detail.

Unfortunately, there are virtually no known preliminary studies and those that do exist cannot be linked to a painting (cf. cat. no. 11). And while the title page of a series of prints of fish by Nicolaes de Bruyn (1571-1656) claims that they can serve as models for painters, sculptors, engravers and goldsmiths, it is highly questionable whether painters deemed those fish sufficiently lively and life-like to adopt them in a painting.⁶

⁶ Ten prints from this series were acquired by the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam in 2001. See *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 50 (2002), pp. 79-80, with two ill.

THE SOUTHERN NETHERLANDS

Antwerp

Like other types of still lifes, pure fish pieces only originated after 1600. However, Netherlandish painters had taken on the challenge of the realistic rendering of fish as early as the 1550s. Although the exact date of Pieter Aertsen's *Fish seller* in Cologne [fig. 1](#) is somewhat uncertain, it was most likely made before the artist returned from Antwerp to his native city of Amsterdam around 1556. While this is the only known fish painting by Aertsen,⁷ his nephew and pupil Joachim Beuckelaer, who remained in Antwerp and worked there until his death in 1575, is the first-known Netherlandish artist to favour the genre. Beuckelaer featured many kinds of fish, small and large, flat and round, sea- and freshwater species, in various market scenes dating from the 1560s and 1570s. Even though his work was copied extensively, it did not immediately inspire a subsequent generation of fish (still-life) painters. The influence of Beuckelaer's work proved itself only several decades later, particularly for Jan Baptiste de Saive the Elder and the Younger. Their workshop in Malines turned out substantial numbers of large market pieces, including many fish markets more or less in Beuckelaer's style throughout the first decades of the seventeenth century.⁸ While indeed confirming the ongoing popularity of these types of scenes, most of the markets from the Saive workshop are somewhat stiff and superficial in their rendering of the fish and figures. [fig. 2](#)

⁷ Aertsen was probably not the inventor of the composition of Jacob Matham's print of a kitchen with fish and the Supper at Emmaus in the background (Hollstein 320). An attribution to Pieter van Rijck proposed by Ger Luijten (Amsterdam 1997, p. 98 and p. 100, note 1), is equally unconvincing. I doubt that the series of five prints, as has consistently been assumed, was published in its entirety in 1603 (the date on one of them). The signatures, the lettering of the respective inscriptions and the execution of the individual prints differ markedly, and the kitchen piece type with fish should be dated later to around 1610. In fact, the composition is strongly reminiscent of comparable kitchen scenes by Floris van Schooten.

⁸ Many works from the Saive workshop appeared on the art market as by 'follower of Joachim Beuckelaer' or from 'studio of Joachim Beuckelaer'.



fig. 1 Pieter Aertsen, *Fish seller*. Oil on panel, 127 x 85 cm.

Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum. Photo: Rheinisches Bildarchiv, Cologne

A more idiosyncratic and creative answer to Beuckelaer's model is found in the oeuvre of Frans Snijders. Among the best works by this virtuoso painter of still lifes and animal scenes are his market pieces, including several large fish stalls, which he painted individually and in series (cat. no. 2). Perhaps the most impressive of these is a painting in the Hermitage in St Petersburg, which is part of a series of four representing the Four Elements. The fish stall, naturally, stands for Water. **fig. 3** Although only a few freshwater fish inhabit this painting, Snijders' range of sea fish is virtually encyclopaedic. Only one or two specimens of most of the species are depicted along with a few not indigenous to local waters.⁹ Snijders may have drawn studies of the

⁹ For a detailed discussion of Snijders' fish, see Gijzen 1962.



fig. 2 Workshop of Jan Baptiste de Saive I and II, *Fish market*. Oil on canvas, 141.6 x 191.8 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

more exotic varieties during his sojourn in Italy in 1608-1609. In addition to fish, Snijders introduced seals, turtles, crabs and other creatures of the sea.

A lobster assumes a prominent place in one of Snijders' few fish still lifes proper. fig. 4 The artist painted his first markets in the 1610s, which thus rank among the earliest seventeenth-century paintings with fish as the main subject, and the still life in Brussels most likely dates from the same period.¹⁰ Nevertheless, credit for the earliest pure fish still life should probably be awarded to a woman.

¹⁰ Hella Robels' dating of the painting in Brussels to 1610-1612 (Robels 1989, no. 101, p. 247) strikes me as too early.

In 1611 Clara Peeters made a series of four still lifes, which – like Snijders' markets in St Petersburg and Beuckelaer's series in London – probably represent the Four Elements.¹¹ The fish still life in this series is the earliest known dated example painted in northern Europe thus far (cat. no. 5).

¹¹ Madrid, Museo del Prado, inv. nos. 1619 to 1622. *Air* is represented by a still life with dead fowl, *Earth* includes flowers and nuts, while a pasty, metal objects and ceramic as products of *Fire* represent that element.



fig. 3 Frans Snijders, *Fish stall*. Oil on canvas, 209 x 343 cm.
St Petersburg, Hermitage



fig. 4 Frans Snijders, *Fish still life with a lobster*. Oil on panel, 70 x 106 cm.
Brussels, Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België. © IRPA-KIK Brussels

Peeters clearly relished portraying fish. She piled them up in brass or earthenware strainers surrounded by shrimp, little red crayfish or glistening oysters in their lacy shells, sometimes watched by dreamy-eyed cats (cat. no. 6).

Quite plausibly, Clara Peeters painted most, if not all, of her fish still lifes in the 1610s. Their popularity is confirmed by several extant copies and, indeed, the first firm record of her name is found with respect to a copy of one of her fish still lifes listed in the 1627 inventory of Herman Saftleven the Elder in Rotterdam. Such copies were painted, for example, by Nicolaes Cave, who joined the Antwerp guild in 1619. Otherwise, Peeters' fish still lifes were not widely emulated, nor do they seem to have stimulated the further development of the genre by other artists.

With respect to another type of still life with fish, the 'herring banquet', Clara Peeters again appears to have been a protagonist. Her earliest work of this type, from 1612, **fig. 5** may, in terms of its early date, be rivalled solely by a few (undated) compositions by Jacob van Hulsdonck, who became a master in 1608. **fig. 6**

Notwithstanding the difficulty of determining exact dates for fish scenes by other Antwerp painters, virtually none appear to have been painted during the 1620s. Judging from the datable output, however, the genre must have gained in popularity during the 1630s.

¹² Earlier dates appear to have been misread as they do not correspond with the chronology of Adriaenssen's work. Specifically, the date on two fish pieces, formerly given as 1623, should probably be read as 1643 (Spiessens 1989, cat. nos. 1 and 2). Adriaenssen may have painted other subjects prior to 1630, however no such works are known. Spiessens (pp. 50-51) notes that Adriaenssen joined the guild as a 'water painter', which she probably correctly interprets as a water-colour painter, presumably of (temporary) decorations. For instance, in 1635 he was commissioned by the city of Antwerp to repaint the arms of the Dutch provinces on triumphal arches that had been erected in the city. He is called an 'artist painter' only in notarial deeds as of 1633.

The work of Alexander Adriaenssen, arguably the most productive fish still-life painter in seventeenth-century Antwerp, displays little affinity with Clara Peeters' fish pieces, even though he was surely familiar with them. Adriaenssen began his artistic training as early as 1597 (around the age of ten) and was accepted as a master in the Antwerp guild in 1610, yet he only painted his earliest known dated still lifes – one of game and one with fish – in 1631.¹² **fig. 7** By then he had already developed the characteristic style he would continue to use until his death in 1661, by which time contemporaries may well have labelled his late work as archaic. Adriaenssen's paintings undeniably have a certain naive charm. Unfortunately, his technical

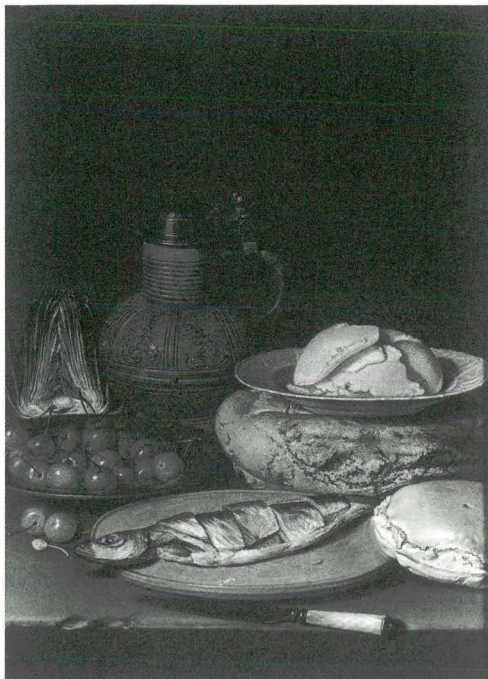


fig. 5 Clara Peeters, *Herring banquet*, 1612. Oil on panel, 45.5 x 33.5 cm.
Formerly Richard Green Gallery, London. Photo: RKD, The Hague

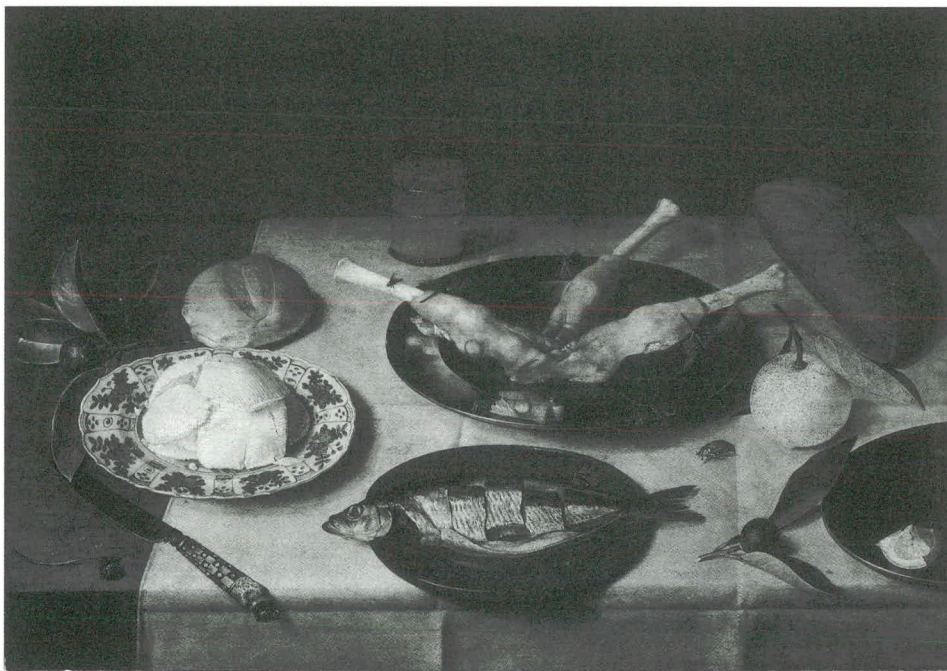


fig. 6 Jacob van Hulsdonck, *Still life with a herring*. Oil on panel, 48.5 x 64.5 cm.
Enschede, Rijksmuseum Twenthe

skills must not have been up to snuff since very few of his paintings have weathered the ages in satisfactory condition. Their scale and relatively modest execution indicate that Adriaenssen did not work for the *crème de la crème*, in contrast to Snijders and presumably Clara Peeters as well.

Although Adriaenssen painted a variety of other types of still lifes (fruit, flowers, game), his sheer output in this area earns him the status of specialist in the fish genre: he produced more than 60 pure fish still lifes, along with several still lifes in which fish are combined with other motifs. No other seventeenth-century Antwerp painter of still lifes can match this. To be sure, though, the quality of his fish still lifes was regularly surpassed by other artists who only sporadically chose fish as their subject matter.

In the 1630s, the most notable other painters of still lifes with fish were Jacob van Es, Frans Ykens and Adriaen van Utrecht.

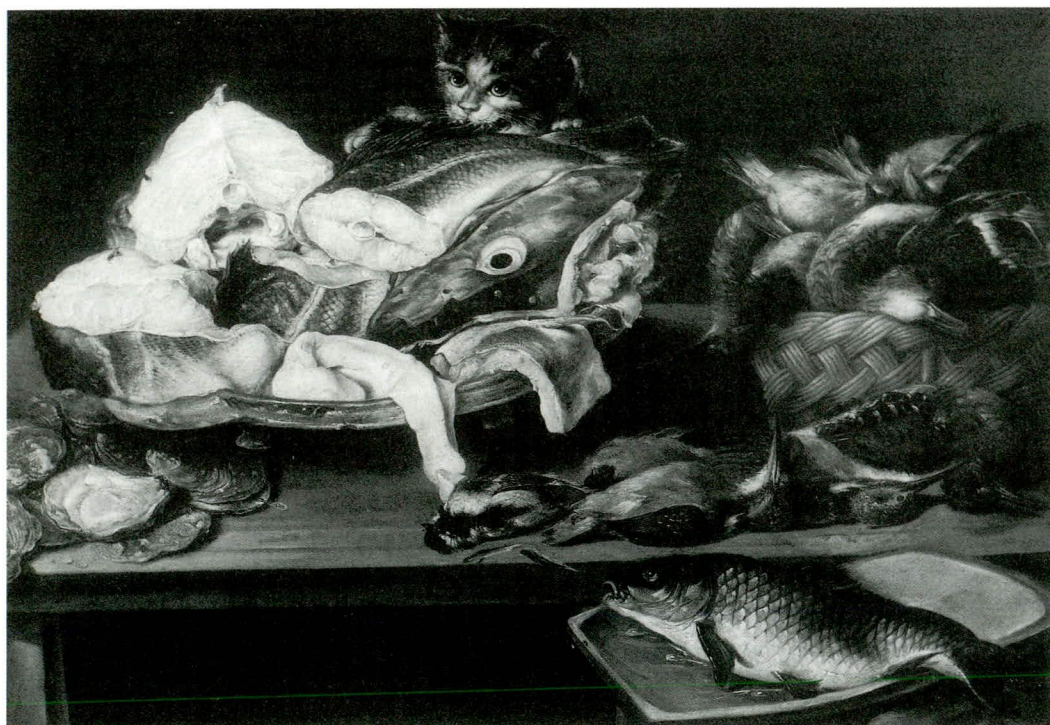


fig. 7 Alexander Adriaenssen, *Fish still life with a cat and dead birds*, 1631.
Oil on panel, 46.9 x 64.6 cm. York, City Art Gallery

Jacob van Es' technical abilities contrast greatly with Adriaenssen's, and as a result many of Van Es' paintings have come down to us in excellent condition. Fish occur in several of his still lifes, but only a few qualify as pure fish still lifes. Van Es' *chef d'oeuvre* in this respect is a large oblong painting in Frankfurt presumably representing a fish seller's counter (cat. no. 7). Numerous fish – predominantly sea fish – are displayed whole, incised and sliced. Hovering above the counter is a carp suspended from a piece of twine that has been strung through its dorsal fin. This feature of a suspended carp occurs quite frequently in fish still lifes. It is not clear whether this way of displaying the fish was common, perhaps among fishmongers, or had some practical use connected to its conservation or preparation. Whatever the case may be, the fish was depicted in a very natural pose as though still swimming around.

In the work of Adriaen van Utrecht and that of Frans Ykens fish occur primarily in kitchen pieces, although both artists also painted several individual fish still lifes. A large canvas by Ykens of 1649 – with two figures attributed to Jan Cossiers – could represent either a market stall or a scene in a kitchen. **fig. 8** The latter seems more likely, albeit the fisherman – recognisable as such by his coarse woollen cap – is not someone we would expect to see in a kitchen. On the other hand, the presence of vegetables, fruit and cauldrons in a fish-market stall seems equally unlikely. In his few still lifes of fish on a tabletop, Ykens also often included vegetables and fruit and the occasional lobster or oysters.¹³ (ill. p. 429)

In contrast, Adriaen van Utrecht produced a few still lifes with little other than fish, one of which is arguably the best work he ever painted.¹⁴ **fig. 9** Drawn close to the display, the viewer confronts a single carp set in an earthenware strainer next to a basket filled with artichokes, asparagus, salsify and celery. In front, along the edge of the table, is a selection of small and medium-sized sea- and freshwater fish, scattered as though they had just been poured out of a bucket onto the table on the painter's behalf. Van Utrecht created a varied and animated image by juxtaposing the silvery-brown fish with the differently toned and textured vegetables and the reddish brown

¹³ For example, a still life of fish, a lobster, fruit and vegetables (oil on canvas, 66.5 x 91 cm), which was auctioned by Lempertz, Cologne, 14 May 1994, lot 351 (ill. in colour, incorrectly as by A. Adriaenssen).

¹⁴ When the painting was offered in a sale at Lempertz, Cologne, 11 December 1989, lot 452 (ill. in colour), it was said to be dated 1649. When I examined it in 2002 prior to its sale at Sotheby's, London, 10 July 2002, lot 25 (ill. in colour), the date was not or no longer visible.



fig. 8 Frans Ykens and Jan Cossiers, *Kitchen scene with fish*, 1649. Oil on canvas, 167 x 235.5 cm.
Private collection. Photo: RKD, The Hague



fig. 9 Adriaen van Utrecht, *Fish still life*. Oil on panel, 53.4 x 75.5 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

strainer. Moreover, he achieved unity by means of the parallels between the various curves, shapes and sizes of the fish, the repetition of which lends the composition a sense of rhythm.

Born in Antwerp, where he was also registered as a pupil in 1632, Jan Dirven does not appear to have become a master there. Similarly, while his death was also recorded in Antwerp in 1653, he probably spent much of his working life elsewhere. Judging from the style of his few fish still lifes he must have been active in Holland, specifically in The Hague, and therefore is discussed below.

Another minor, but no less talented master is Peeter van den Bemden, whose work was long unknown. He probably began as an amateur, but was registered as a master in the Antwerp guild in 1649-1650. He favoured the game still life but also turned out a number of fish pieces in the course



fig. 10 Peeter van den Bemden, *Fish still life*. Oil on canvas, 94.7 x 114.3 cm.

Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

of his short-lived painting career. The composition of his most elaborate fish still life betrays the influence of Alexander Adriaenssen, while its grandeur is also indebted to the kitchens and markets by Adriaen van Utrecht and Frans Snijders.¹⁵ fig. 10

¹⁵ Sale Amsterdam (Sotheby's) 8 May 2001, lot 21 (ill. in colour), as circle of Isaac van Duijnen, but sold with a mention of the correct name of its maker. The diagonally placed sturgeon recalls a prominent fish in the impressive *Fish stall* by Frans Snijders with figures by Anthony van Dyck in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, inv. no. 382. The arrangement of some fish or a lobster on a separate stool to the side and in front of the table is found in compositions by Alexander Adriaenssen.

Joannes Fijt devised an entirely different kind of fish still life, probably some time in the 1650s. fig. 11 Scattered on a coarse wooden table and on the quay of a walled town is what would appear to be the day's catch of a fishing vessel, perhaps from one of the two boats moored in the background. Upon closer scrutiny, however, it is clear that this cannot be the catch of a random sea fisherman. Carp, one featuring prominently in the middle of the scene, do occasionally inhabit coastal waters, but this is not the case for pike, a few specimens of which are also depicted. Some of the larger fish could have been sliced up while still at sea in order to be sold fresh on the quay immediately after having been brought to shore, but lobsters – which fill up a large basket at the top – turn red only after having been cooked. Clearly this impressive fish scene is the product of artistic freedom rather than being a close rendering of reality.



fig. 11 Joannes Fijt, *Still life of fish on a quay*. Oil on canvas, 153 x 269 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

Fijt's chief subject was the game still life, in which he displayed trophies of the hunt, ranging from small still lifes with a few birds or a single hare to large imposing canvasses with deer, wild boar and other large game piled on top of each other. He frequently enlivened these still lifes with dogs and cats and in this fish still life, which exudes an atmosphere very like that of his game pieces, we see – appropriately – two cats scavenging for a treat.

That these paintings were appreciated for their artistic merits is evidenced by the prominent presence of such a fish still life in a painting by Charles Emmanuel Biset (1633-1691) and others from around 1666.¹⁶ **fig. 12** In the foreground an elegant company appears to be debating the quality of a fish piece by Fijt's pupil, Peeter Boel (a painting very similar to cat. no. 11), being shown to them by a young assistant. Striking is the collection of precious seashells strewn on the floor before the painting, perhaps to emphasise its connection to the sea.

Jan van Kessel the Elder occupies a singular place among Flemish fish still-life painters. A versatile artist who also borrowed from the works of others, Van Kessel created his own type of fish still life, generally painted on small panels or copper plates and often part of a series of various subjects.¹⁷ Such series frequently comprise images of the Four Continents or representations of the Four Elements. Van Kessel generally set his fish in quasi-natural surroundings, displaying the creatures on the beach or beside a stream. His outdoor fish pieces were initially inspired by Jan Brueghel's paintings of the Four Elements, of which Water usually includes a load of fish. **fig. 13** The fact that he had studied with Brueghel's son Jan Brueghel the Younger (1601-1678) makes this even more probable. Van Kessel often combined his own studies and inventions with motifs derived from other artists, such as the seal which was first painted by Frans Sniijders several decades earlier. Interestingly, in 1660 Van Kessel copied a fish still life by Joris van Son, which the latter had painted some four years earlier more or less in what we now consider Van Kessel's style. **figs. 14 and 15** He also occasionally painted fish still lifes set indoors, some of which are highly original, such as a

¹⁶ Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, inv. no. 896. Most, or perhaps all of the paintings in this gallery were done by the artists themselves, including Peeter Boel (the fish still life and the animal scene at the upper right), Theodoor Boeyermans (*The daughters of Cecrops with Erichthonius*, lower right), and an architectural painting by Wilhelm van Ehrenberg dated 1666 (front centre). Oddly enough, several of the allegorical figures representing the Arts (painted by, or in the style of Jacob Jordaens), appear to have stepped out of their frame at the right.

¹⁷ On Jan van Kessel's fish still lifes, see Giepmans 2001 (including a catalogue).



fig. 12 Charles Emmanuel Biset and other artists,
Visitors in a picture gallery, 1666. Oil on canvas, 141 x 236 cm.
Schleissheim, Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen



fig. 13 Jan Brueghel and Hendrick van Balen, *The Element Water*.
Oil on panel, 53 x 95 cm. Rome, Galleria Doria Pamphili



fig. 14 Joris van Son, *Fish on a beach*, 1656. Oil on canvas, 40.6 x 57.5 cm.

Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague



fig. 15 Jan van Kessel, *Fish on a beach*, 1660. Oil on panel, 27 x 37.2 cm.

Henry H. Weldon Collection, New York

¹⁸ A smaller still life of the same theme by Van Kessel was with Johnny van Haeften in London in 2001.

composition related to Lent in which dried fish and other fish dishes are depicted together with a lash and birch rods.¹⁸ **fig. 16**

fig. 16 Jan van Kessel,
Fish still life: Allegory of Lent. Oil on copper,
14.5 x 20.3 cm. Formerly Richard Green
Gallery, London. Photo: RKD, The Hague



Outside of Antwerp

In the seventeenth century, fish were rarely painted in other parts of the Southern Netherlands. In Tournai, Michel Bouillon produced several market stalls with displays of fish, as well as a few real fish still lifes. They manifest Antwerp influences to some extent, as do his other types of still lifes, while nonetheless remaining highly individual works. A large, gaping cod head rears up in almost all of Bouillon's fish still lifes, and thus is almost a signature feature. (ill. p. 401)

Frans van Cuyck de Myerhop was active in Ghent as of around 1663. He painted a number of fish still lifes that bespeak a Dutch background. Although there is no evidence that the painter was ever in the Northern Netherlands, the fish still lifes bearing his monogram exhibit some similarity with the work of Abraham van Beijeren, Isaac van Duijnen and even Jacob Gillig.

Brief mention should be made here of Jacques van de Kerckhove, who was registered as a pupil of Joannes Fijt in 1649, and who must have travelled to Italy shortly thereafter. He worked in Vicenza and Venice, where he was known as Giacomo da Castello or Giacomo Semiterio. His still lifes, including several fish pieces, are characterised by a highly individual synthesis of Flemish and Italian elements, which makes them easy to recognise as his work. (ill. p. 412) In his self-portrait, Van de Kerckhove proudly holds up one of his fish still lifes.¹⁹ While a few of his contemporaries were painting fish still lifes in Italy as well, the genre's popularity there only peaked much later, at the end of the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, with Naples as its most important centre of production.²⁰

¹⁹ Florence, Uffizi, inv. no. A 199.

²⁰ Fish were probably not Van de Kerckhove's initial subject matter following his arrival in Italy and no dated examples are known. Following some early market and kitchen pieces by and from the circles of Vincenzo Campi (Cremona, 1530/35-1591) and Bartolomeo Passarotti (Bologna, c. 1529-1592), paintings in which fish play an important role only began to emerge in Italy around 1650. An early example is a 1653 work by Giovan Battista Recco (Naples, active mid-seventeenth century) (Zeri 1989, vol. II, p. 892, fig. 1070). Naples may be considered the most important Italian centre of fish still-life painting, with members of the Recco and Ruoppolo families as productive representatives of this genre, which remained popular in Italy well into the eighteenth century.

THE NORTHERN NETHERLANDS

Regardless of whether or not Pieter Aertsen's *Fish seller* now in Cologne was executed in Antwerp (see p. 18), his son Pieter Pietersz., based in Amsterdam and Haarlem, must have been familiar with such paintings for they left an indelible mark on his own work, notably his fish sellers in Pommersfelden and Moscow. **fig. 17** The former is dated 1568 and is presumably the earlier of the two given its execution, which is less free and accomplished. However, the Moscow painting will have originated not much later than the early 1570s.

Fish still-life painting in the Northern Netherlands appears to have stagnated for a long time after Pieter Pietersz. The second decade of the seventeenth century eventually witnessed the re-emergence of paintings in which fish play an important role, especially in kitchen and market scenes. A rare example by Jacob van Nieulandt, dated 1617 and undoubtedly painted in Amsterdam, presents a fish stall in the harbour of a walled town. **fig. 18** In addition to sea fish, lobsters and a crab, it includes three prominent figures: a fish seller handing a large slice of fish to a lady, and at the right an old fisherman sitting on a barrel and holding a jug – probably containing beer –



fig. 17 Pieter Pietersz., *A fish seller*. Oil on panel, 112 x 84 cm.
Moscow, Pushkin Museum

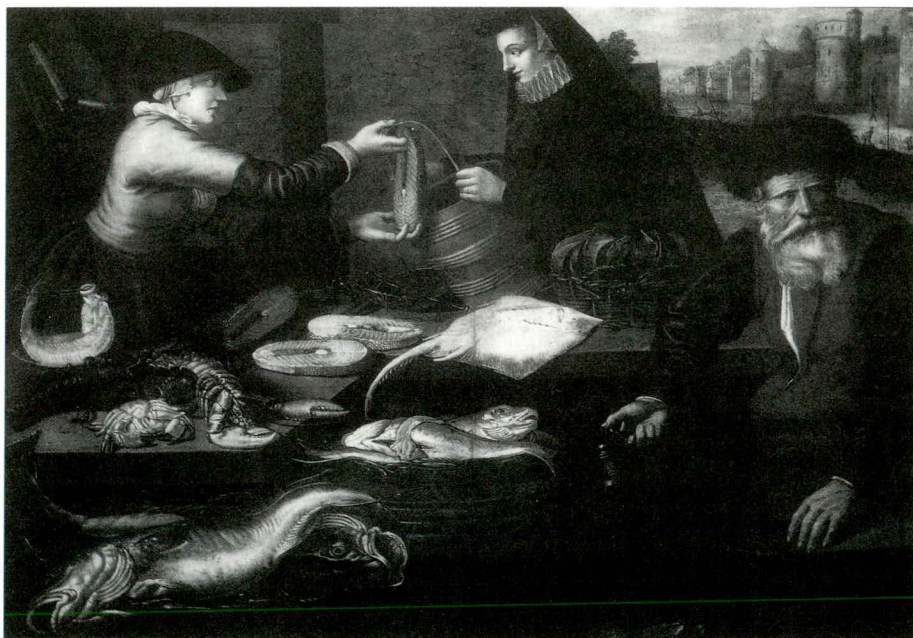


fig. 18 Jacob van Nieulandt, *Figures in a fish stall*, 1617. Oil on canvas, 156 x 207 cm.
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum. © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

in his lap, apparently distracted by something outside of the picture plane. Van Nieulandt's work is clearly indebted to the Aertsen/Pietersz. models.

Painted in the same vein but with a far more individual character, are the kitchens and markets by Floris van Schooten from Haarlem (active 1605-1656). Many include fish, though nowhere as the main motif. One painting that now looks like a proper fish still life may have originally been a kitchen piece which was later reduced, losing the figures in the process.²¹ **fig. 19** Van Schooten's virtually unaltering style makes it difficult to date this painting with any precision, but it may well have been executed in the 1610s. Van Schooten was conceivably directly influenced by Pieter Pietersz., who was active in Haarlem for some time in the 1570s and whose works Van Schooten could have seen in local collections.

21 The painting surfaced at an auction in Frankfurt (Bangel) 6 December 1927, lot 66, as a work by P. van Slingelandt. Poul Gammelbo included it as no. 38 in his catalogue of the artist's work (Gammelbo 1966). Gammelbo does not seem to have noticed that the painting is probably a fragment. For a kitchen scene with fish that might be linked to Van Schooten, see my comment on Matham's series of prints in note 5.



fig. 19 Floris van Schooten, *Kitchen table with fish*. Oil on panel, 83 x 115 cm (probably a fragment). Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

²² Abraham Bredius' archival notes at the RKD (see note 2).

²³ Muller 1880, p. 133.

Just as in Flanders, there appears to have been little demand for fish still lifes in Holland in the 1620s; in any event, they were painted only sporadically. One of the few fish still lifes that demonstrably were produced in Holland before 1630 is a work by Pieter van Veen, a lawyer and keen amateur painter who died in 1629. It is known from a 1630 Hague inventory but can unfortunately no longer be traced.²² The same applies to the still life of fish on a beach that the Utrecht painter Marcus Ormea, discussed below, donated to the local St Job's Hospital in 1628.²³

Dirck Govertsz., a decidedly individualistic artist active in Gorinchem, probably also painted fish early on, although we are unable to date his few pure fish still lifes with any precision. (ill. p. 410) His kitchen scenes, in which

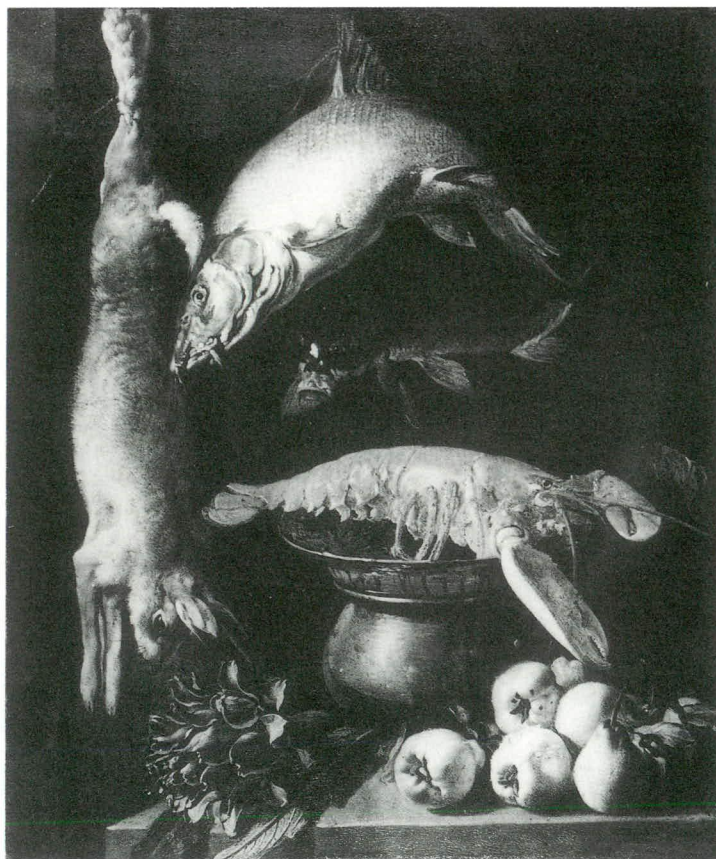


fig. 20 Dirck Govertsz., *Kitchen still life with hanging fish*.

Oil on canvas, 112 x 91 cm. Bonn, Rheinisches Landesmuseum

fish are regularly highlighted, turn up in Dutch probate inventories as early as 1620-1630. While his painting in Bonn is not a true fish still life, the large suspended carp and catfish do draw our immediate attention. **fig. 20**

The Hague

The Hague soon became one of the main centres of fish still-life painting in Holland. Without a doubt, Pieter de Putter was the city's first specialised fish painter and probably the first in all of the Northern Netherlands. Regrettably, he dated only a single one of his known fish still lifes. From 1644, it is a mature work as well as one of his more elaborate compositions. **fig. 21** De Putter's oeuvre displays little to no stylistic development and mentions of fish still lifes by the artist before 1640 are unknown. While, given his age, he could have been active as a painter as of the early 1620s, he more

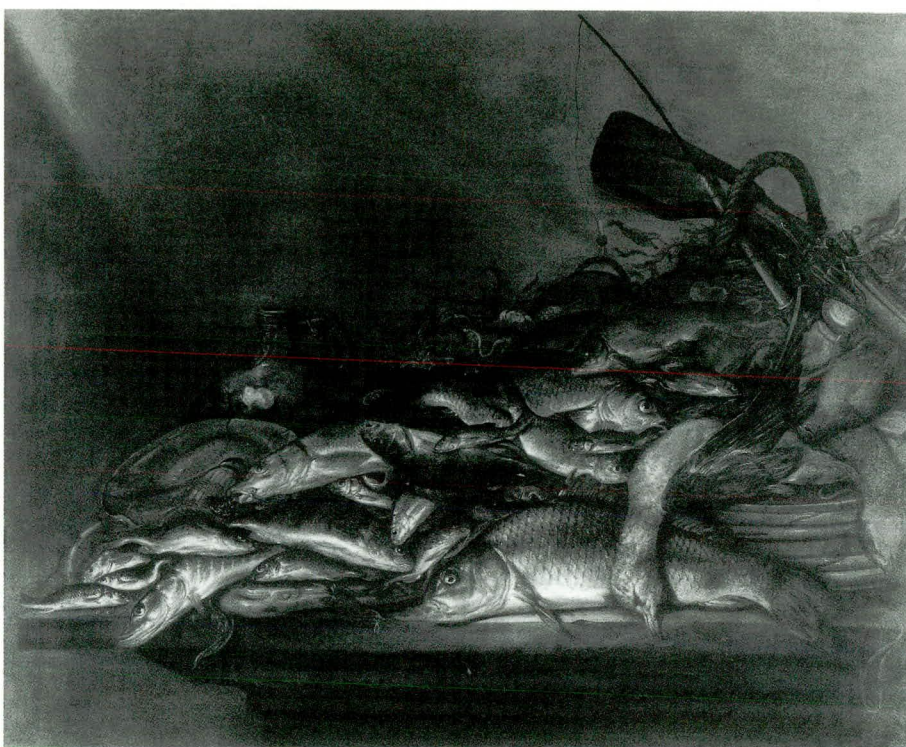


fig. 21 Pieter de Putter, *Fish still life with dead birds and a rifle*, 1644.

Oil on panel, 93.5 x 114 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

likely began depicting fish later in the 1630s. He may have painted other subjects – about which we know nothing – earlier. A few portraits by him from later years are known. Another indication of De Putter's late start as a fish still-life painter may be seen in a certain correspondence between his work and that of Alexander Adriaenssen, though this could also be sheer coincidence.

Pieter de Putter invented several compositional types, which he used and reused, the most common one showing fish piled up on a plain tabletop, together with some fishing equipment, a strainer, a wooden tray or a stoneware jug. Generally he kept the space above one of the diagonals relatively open. But for a few exceptions, the fish depicted are freshwater species, including carp, pike, bream and smaller kinds. De Putter has been accused of giving the fish still life a bad name because of his rigid piles of fairly stiff fish staring vacantly out at the viewer. The painter nevertheless rightly earned his place in this field if only for the devotion he lavished on the detailed rendering of the gleaming silvery-brown scales and the charming naiveté of his simpler compositions in particular.

In addition to portraying fish on a table, De Putter regularly arranged his subjects on the floor of a shed, amidst some bustling fisher folk, often with a scene of fishing viewed through an open door in the background (cat. no. 17). Other images of fish with more prominent figures by the artist border on kitchen or market pieces (cat. no. 16).

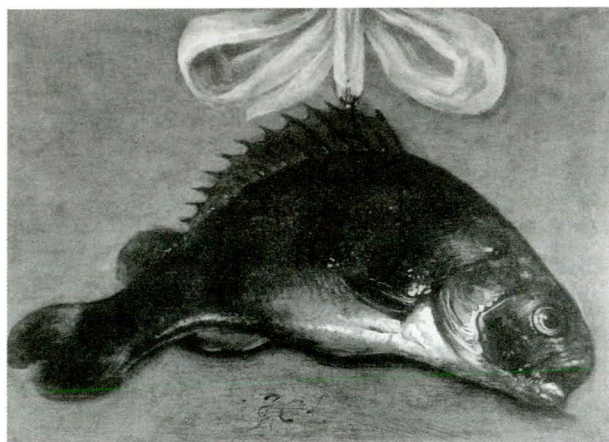


fig. 22 Johannes Kuveenis I, *Ruff hanging from a ribbon*.

Oil on panel, 18.5 x 25 cm. Present whereabouts unknown.

Photo: RKD, The Hague

Since De Putter's fish are rarely mentioned in rich inventories, one assumes that they were painted for the lower end of the art market.²⁴ It is noteworthy that many of the artist's patrons owned not just one but several paintings by him, for instance Miss Maria van Nes, mentioned above. Like several of his colleagues, De Putter occasionally tried to settle his debts with one or more of his paintings, allowing some of his creditors to thus assemble a small collection of his work.²⁵

²⁴ Judging from Abraham Bredius' archival notes at the RKD (see note 2).

²⁵ Bredius 1915-1922, p. 1161.

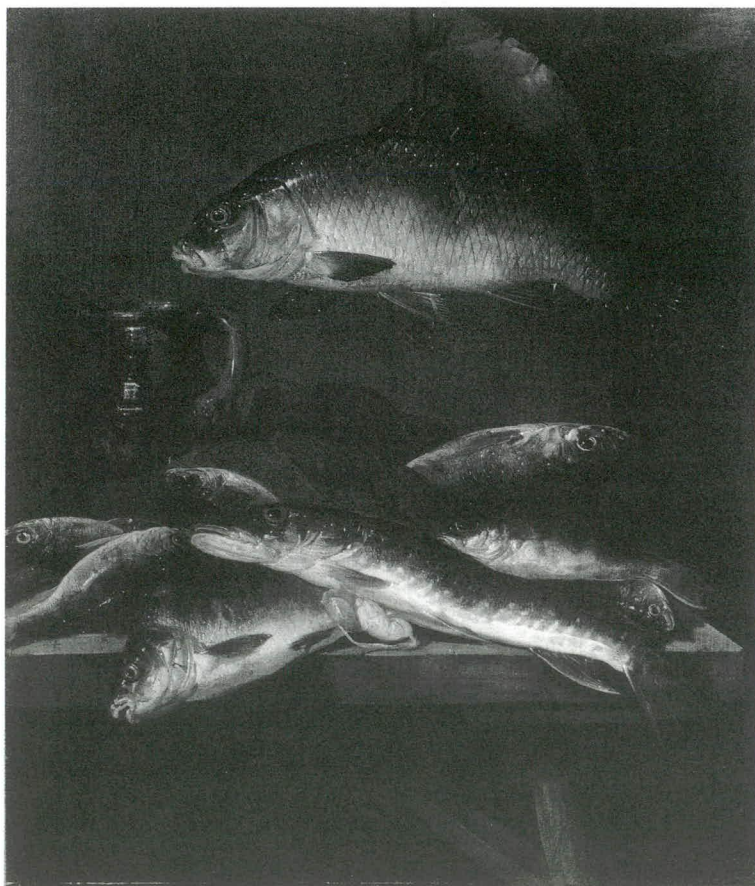
Notwithstanding the modest quality of his oeuvre, De Putter seems to have inspired several other Hague painters. Both the fish and the cat in the only known fish still life by the Hague engraver and portrait painter Crispijn van den Queborn, the artist's brother-in-law, are akin to De Putter's. The latter's fish, however, are much livelier compared to Van den Queborn's. (ill. p. 421) Johannes Kuveenis, who was active for about two decades in The Hague before moving to Amsterdam around 1660, was also influenced by De Putter to some degree. Despite their marked Hague style, an incorrect reading of the monogram on his modest still lifes of fish has regularly yielded unlikely attributions, for instance to Jacob Gerritsz. Cuyp, Jan Olis and Jacob Gillig. **fig. 22**

The Antwerp trained Jan Dirven mentioned above also seems to have responded to De Putter in the mid-1640s. (ill. p. 407) One of his best works includes three large carp, one of which is suspended from a string at the top of the painting. **fig. 24** Dirven clearly presented his fish as part of a catch, combined with some fishing gear: nets and a fishing rod. Curiously, he included a sizeable oyster in this composition of freshwater fish. The water lily at the right is a highly original addition. It is Dirven's last dated fish still life, and its quality far surpasses that of his earlier examples which barely equal that of average work by Pieter de Putter or Johannes Kuveenis.

The most productive and according to many also the best Dutch fish still-life painter, Abraham van Beijeren, also seems to have relied on De Putter as a model in his early years. Van Beijeren's earliest known dated fish still life is from 1654 or 1655, but it must surely have been preceded by others.²⁶

²⁶ A still life of fish in a sale in Cologne, 7 June 1886, lot 54, was signed and dated 1654. The painting is included in Bernström & Rapp 1957 as a seventeenth-century copy, however the illustration in the sales catalogue, the only one we have of it, does not allow for an assessment of its authenticity. The composition is practically a mirror image of Van Beijeren's (next) earliest known dated work in the Staatliche Museen in Berlin, cat. no. 983D.

fig. 23 Abraham van Beijeren,
Still life of freshwater fish.
 Oil on canvas, 73 x 61 cm.
 Paris, Musée du Louvre.
 © Photo RMN – Gérard Blot



Around 1650, Van Beijeren appears to have turned his attention from freshwater fish to sea fish. One of his best still lifes in this genre – with freshwater fish – is fairly early, presumably from the second half of the 1640s. **fig. 23** It displays an unmistakable affinity with a work by Pieter de Putter, **fig. 25** who was a cousin by marriage of Van Beijeren's second wife, Anna van den Queborn. Very few still lifes with freshwater fish by the artist are known however, and he must have already produced some paintings of sea fish in the 1640s. Unfortunately, due to their size and decorative character, the fish depicted in a large votive tablet for the church in Maassluis of 1649, to which Van Beijeren contributed substantially, cannot be considered representative of his work (fig. 13, p. 89).²⁷

²⁷ See Sullivan 1987 and my response, Meijer 1988. At the time, I proposed a tentative, rather than a full attribution to Van Beijeren for the large fish in the *Fishery board*. Upon having examined the board in great detail during its restoration in the early 1990s, I am convinced that he was indeed responsible for the fish.



fig. 24 Jan Dirven, *Fish still life with a hanging carp*, 1649.
Oil on panel, 64 x 49 cm. Darmstadt, Hessisches Landesmuseum



fig. 25 Pieter de Putter, *Still life of freshwater fish*.
Oil on canvas, 82.5 x 98 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

Once he had developed his own distinctive manner of painting sea fish, Van Beijeren seems to have continued using it throughout his career. He usually worked on a fairly dark ground, modelling the fish in brown, grey and white tones and some colour accents. He rendered the bodies of the fish in transparent, loosely painted layers. His fluid brushwork lent the fish just the gleam and shimmer necessary to suggest their wet, slippery bodies, which stand out against the relatively dark background. His compositions range from modest scenes with only a few fish arranged on a table or in a basket, to lavish displays of big fish on the beach, the daily catch, ready for sale (cat. nos. 18-22).

Isaac van Duijnen, who was originally from Dordrecht, settled in The Hague in the mid-1650s after having travelled to Rome, a journey, incidentally, which appears to have had little impact on his painting style. In so far as his few dated works allow for a chronology of his subject matter, he seems to have initially preferred freshwater fish, along with fruit and vegetables. In The Hague he became captivated by Abraham van Beijeren and soon



fig. 26 Isaac van Duijnen, *Fish still life with a fisherman*. Oil on canvas, 133 x 210 cm.
Brussels, Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België. © IRPA-KIK Brussels

began painting sea fish, often shamelessly imitating Van Beijeren's style and compositions (cat. nos. 23 and 24). His handling of paint is not as loose as that of his model, making the fish appear heavier and more compact, and a deviating application of highlights detracts from their sense of moistness and sheen. A large canvas in Brussels makes the impression of being a transitional work with freshwater fish at the left and sea fish undeniably inspired by Van Beijeren at the right. **fig. 26**

Part of Van Duijnen's success in The Hague – attested to by the presence of many of his works in important seventeenth-century Hague collections, as noted above – may have been due to Van Beijeren's move to Delft shortly after Van Duijnen's arrival. The former returned to The Hague after five years, but may have been compelled by Van Duijnen's strong position in the market to move to Amsterdam another five years later.

The influence of both Van Beijeren and Van Duijnen is manifest in the work of a few less talented fish still-life painters who had either trained or were active in The Hague. For example, Pieter Verbeeck (cat. no. 25) initially opted for a style somewhat related to that of Pieter de Putter, but his later works are almost indistinguishable from Van Duijnen's simpler compositions. Julius de Geest (active 1657-in or after 1695), the son of the famous Frisian portrait painter Wybrand de Geest (1592-after 1667), received part of his training in The Hague. The only still life attributed to him betrays a certain Hague influence; however, Utrecht features can also be singled out in this painting.²⁸

Not particularly competent was the artist who signed as 'RVBurgh', most likely Rochus van Burgh, whose fish paintings are little more than weak reflections of Van Beijeren and Van Duijnen's work, despite being original compositions and not simply copies. (ill. p. 404) Van Burgh apparently had the Hague market for fish still lifes largely to himself, since at the time he was working there around the end of the 1680s Van Duijnen had already died and Van Beijeren had long moved away. A possible rival may have been Jan Boogaert, whose previously unpublished fish still life in the Town Hall of Middelburg clearly belongs to the same school.²⁹ **fig. 27**

²⁸ Oil on canvas, 63 x 78 cm, sale London (Sotheby's) 8 April 1987, lot 179 (ill. in colour). Studying this painting during the viewing days, I noted that the signature was virtually illegible, thus making the attribution uncertain. The shells on the table are reminiscent of work by Jan de Bont and the basket of plaice with some straw in the centre is a Utrecht motif also encountered in still lifes by Willem Ormea. Because of the uncertain attribution of this work, De Geest has been left out of the *Compendium* included in this catalogue.

²⁹ The exact provenance of the painting is unclear, but it was probably purchased after the Second World War to decorate the Town Hall of Middelburg. It was thought to be the work of the Middelburg marine painter Jan Boogaert, actually named Iemant Boogaert (active c. 1644-1656). However, deriving from Van Beijeren, its style characterises it in no uncertain terms as the work of a Hague painter. See also Van der Willigen & Meijer 2003, p. 42.

By the 1690s, fish still lifes had lost ground in The Hague; virtually none were produced thereafter. The only known fish scene from later years is dated around 1707 and was made by an artist specialised in game still lifes, Jacobus Jorisz. van der Hagen.³⁰ (ill. p. 411) It is still vaguely reminiscent of Isaac van Duijnen's work.

³⁰ Oil on canvas, 63.5 x 86.5 cm. The painting came up for sale at Sotheby's, London in 1961 and on 11 June 1980, as a work by J. C. van der Hagen dated 1717. Its style and execution, however, are clearly Jacob Jorisz. van der Hagen's, who died in 1715. Therefore the date must originally have been 1707 (or perhaps 1712 or 1713).

A Hague artist worthy of special mention is Petrus Staverenus, who joined the guild in 1635 and was active in the city until at least 1654. Although primarily a genre painter, he was distinctly interested in fish and a number of fish still lifes can be ascribed to him. A masterful example of how he combined near caricatural figures with prominent still life elements is his



fig. 27 Jan Boogaert, *Fish still life*. Oil on panel, 47 x 62 cm. Middelburg, Town Hall

Fish stall, formerly in a private collection.³¹ **fig. 28** It exemplifies the high quality of his work: their mouths open, the superbly modelled and detailed fish seem to participate in the lively conversation of the figures. In other paintings a single figure is shown handling fish on a table, and in one of his very best still lifes a cat plays around a pile of slippery fish that have slid out of a bucket. His head peeking into the composition, a dog is distracted by the cat from a heap of entrails right under his nose. (ill. p. 424) An exceptional and impressive panel presenting a young girl near a display of enormous freshwater fish may be identified as an early work by Staverenus.³² **fig. 29**



fig. 28 Petrus Staverenus, *A fish stall*. Support and dimensions unknown. Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

³¹ In the collection of Lord Lonsdale around 1926 as by Gabriel Metsu, and evidently not included in the sale of that collection in 1937.

³² For the first, see sale Zurich (Koller) 13/15 March 1991, lot 90. A related painting, illustrated in Bernt 1970, vol. 3, no. 1109, is more readily a copy of Staverenus than an autograph work by the artist himself. For the second, see the illustration in the *Compendium* (p. 424). The third, the still life with a young girl: oil on panel, 95 x 125 cm; Stuttgart, Württembergische Staatsgalerie, cat. 1931, no. 471, is given to P. de Putter. This attribution was proposed by Abraham Bredius.

S. J. Gudlaugsson later suggested A. Adriaenssen on the photo mount of this painting at the RKD. However, the painting entered the museum from the collection in Ludwigsburg Castle as by a certain 'Taverna', which may be a corruption of Staverenus. In any case, the handling of the fish corresponds with that in still lifes that in my opinion can be convincingly attributed to him. If by Staverenus, it must be an early work from the 1630s. The execution of the figure appears to be weaker and is probably by another hand.

A painting offered for sale as work by P. van Schaevenborgh by the Brian Koetser Gallery in London in 1972 (advertisement in *Burlington Magazine*, May 1972), was most certainly not painted by him and may be a late work by Staverenus. According to the art dealer it was signed with a monogram 'P.S.' and dated 1666. The date is probably too late for Van Schaevenborgh, whose last sign of life is from 1657, and it may well also be too late for Staverenus. Hopefully, the painting will resurface and it will be possible to examine it first hand at some point.



fig. 29 Attributed to Petrus Staverenus, *Girl with a display of fish*.
Oil on panel, 95 x 125 cm. Stuttgart, Württembergische Staatgalerie

Utrecht

Like The Hague, Utrecht, too, was an important centre of seventeenth-century fish still-life painting in the Northern Netherlands. The earliest record of a Utrecht fish still life is of a painting of fish on a beach by Marcus Ormea, a work he donated to the local St Job's Hospital in 1628, as mentioned earlier. Although Ormea was first registered as a member of the guild in 1611, there are no records of any other work by him and it is uncertain whether he was a specialised fish painter like his son Willem Ormea. The latter's earliest known dated fish still life is from 1634. In Willem Ormea's early scenes in this genre the fish are rather stiff and lifeless, and somewhat naively portrayed. **fig. 30** His technique clearly improved in the course of the 1640s and the rendering of his subjects was more carefully observed. This resulted in several attractive works, especially those provided with a lively marine

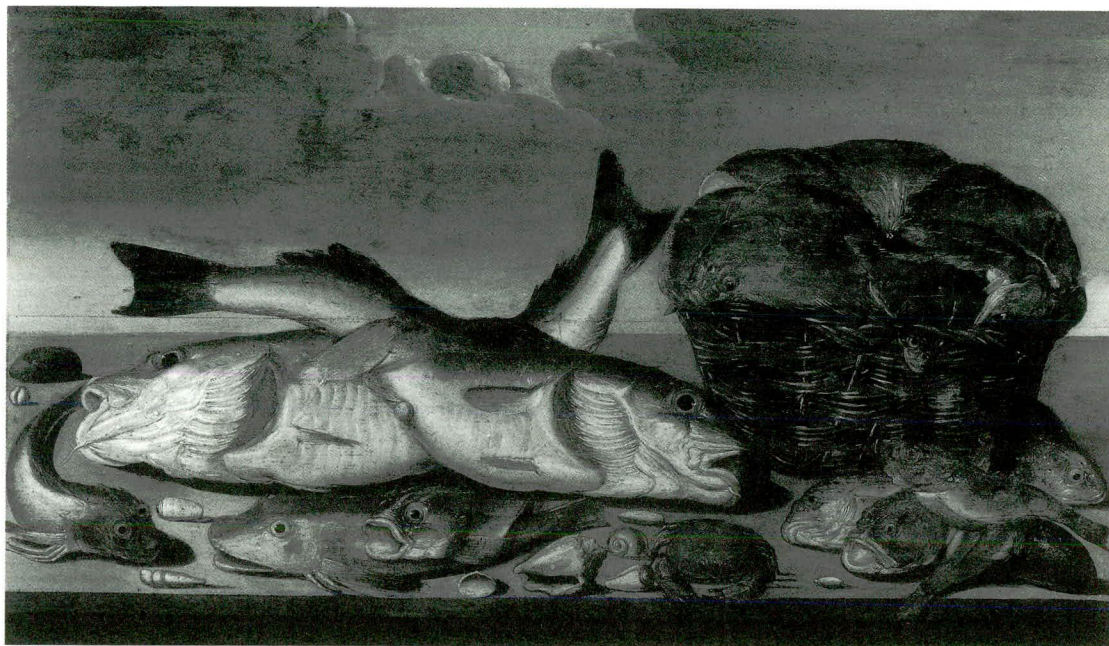


fig. 30 Willem Ormea, *Fish still life*, 1638. Oil on panel, 54.5 x 92 cm.
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum. © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

background by members of the Willaerts family. The Willaertses did this on a regular basis, usually as the result of a genuine collaborative effort and sometimes later at the request of the painting's owner.³³ It is interesting to compare a still life by Ormea with a background by Willaerts to one without such a background. **figs. 31 and 32** In the latter, Ormea clearly anticipated the inclusion of a seascape background, yet it does not make an unfinished impression. These two paintings also demonstrate that the artist depicted the same fish in various still lifes, if necessary adjusting their dimensions and minor details. It is striking that Ormea, like various other Utrecht painters, opted for sea rather than freshwater fish as his subject matter while the city was, in fact, quite far removed from the coast. Could this have been the very reason why these paintings appealed to Utrecht buyers?

J.B. Wijnveldt, whose first names and dates of birth and death are unknown, painted a still life of fish on a beach in 1667, which seems to characterise him as a follower of Ormea. Accordingly, he was probably active in or near Utrecht. (ill. p. 428)

³³ Bol 1973, p. 79, refers to a record of payment to Willaerts for adding a seascape in the background of such a work.



fig. 31 Willem Ormea and Abraham (?) Willaerts, *Fish on a beach*, 1640.
Oil on canvas, 44 x 64 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague



fig. 32 Willem Ormea, *Fish on a beach*, 1646. Oil on canvas, 69 x 101 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

The most inventive Utrecht fish still-life painter was Jan de Bont. His oeuvre comprises most of the known types of fish still life, from small scenes of freshwater fish laid out on a table to grand beach views with figures and ships in the background. De Bont's compositions are more animated and his fish more naturally rendered than Ormea's. A fairly early example of his work of freshwater fish, for example, reveals a world of difference with Ormea's rigid sea fish discussed above. **fig. 33** We may safely assume that the two painters worked for a different clientele and that they will hardly have had to compete with one another.

The figures in a large fish stall attributed to De Bont are reminiscent of the work of another Utrecht painter, Aelbert van der Schoor.³⁴ **fig. 34** Although primarily a figure painter, Van der Schoor also had a penchant for depicting fish. A fragment of a still life with fish on a beach must have

34 Oil on canvas, 133.5 x 193 cm, with traces of a signature, at the Galleria Caretto, Turin, 1989 (cat. no. 71, ill. in colour, as by H. Mz. Sorgh and J. de Bont). I doubt whether the figures could have been done by Van der Schoor; perhaps they were painted by De Bont in his style. The former attribution to the Rotterdam painter Sorgh is certainly incorrect.

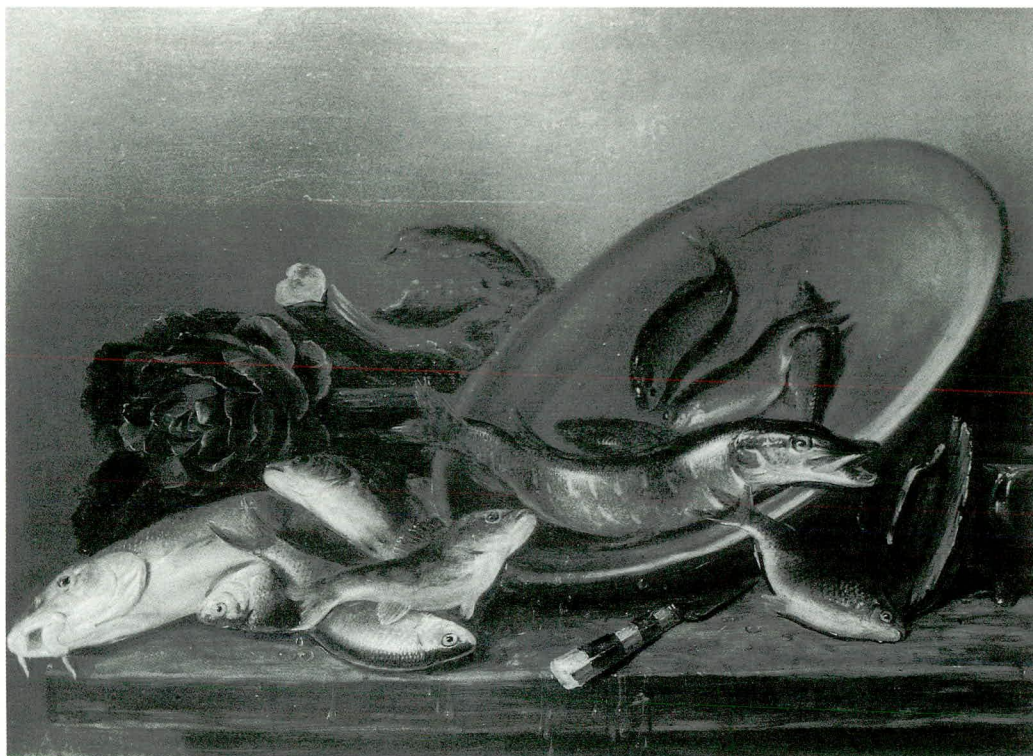


fig. 33 Jan de Bont, *Still life of freshwater fish*, 1644. Oil on panel, 55 x 73 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

³⁵ Oil on panel, 11 x 56 cm, signed and dated 1658, F.C. Bütöt collection, Amsterdam, later St Gilgen (CH), sale Amsterdam (Sotheby's) 16 November 1993, lot 14 (ill. in colour).

originally featured a seascape in the background.³⁵ (ill. p. 423) The boy occupying a prominent place in another one of his still lifes – or is it a fish stall? – from 1657, gestures meaningfully while looking intently at the beholder. Unfortunately, the content of his message is lost on us. **fig. 35**

Jacob Gillig did not begin his artistic career as a painter. Initially he was a tradesman and later a warder at the Utrecht prison, which was located near the fish market. Perhaps he began painting as an amateur after marrying into the Willaerts family of painters. An early work by him signed 'Ja. Gulek', the date of which should probably be read as 1663, may well be a copy of a fish still life by Ormea with a background by one of the Willaertses. **fig. 36** Gillig's preference for freshwater fish soon manifested itself, and by 1665 he had developed a distinct and individual style, rendering the silvery fish bodies in brown and green undertones and including a few colour accents, for example some red fins or a blue tablecloth. In his favourite type of com-



fig. 34 Attributed to Jan de Bont, *Fish stall on the coast*. Oil on canvas, 133.5 x 193 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

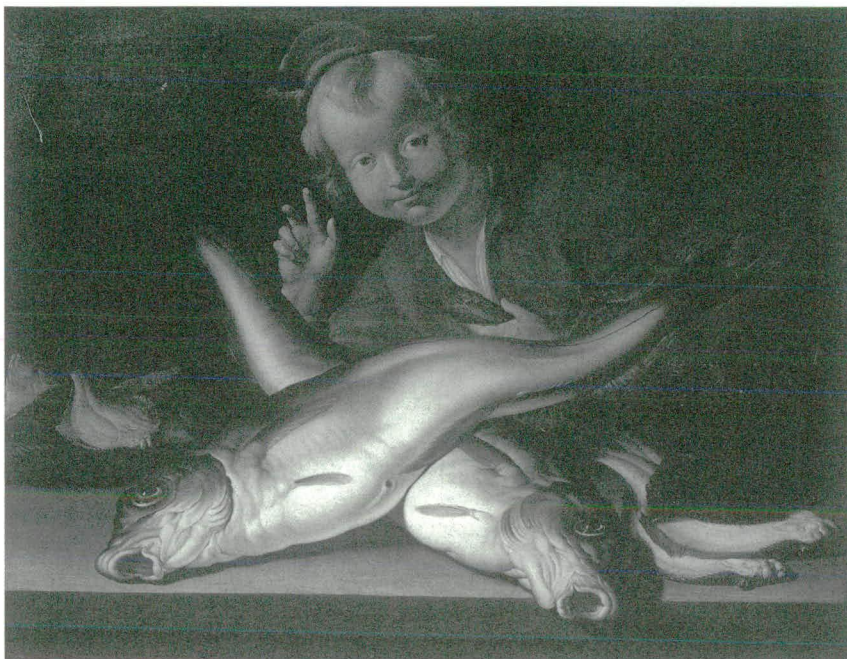


fig. 35 Aelbert van der Schoor, *Fish still life with a young boy*, 1657. Oil on canvas, 52 x 65 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague



fig. 36 Jacob Gillig, *Fish on a beach*, 1663. Oil on panel, dimensions unknown.
Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

position, a 'cascade' or 'pyramid' of fish is presented on a table, in a niche or before a landscape.

Gillig also painted a few portraits: in his 1729 account, Jacob Campo Weyerman (1677-1747) relates that Gillig, whom he calls 'a jolly fellow', switched to portraiture at the time of the French occupation of the Northern Netherlands because the economic situation made it impossible for him to sell fish still lifes.³⁶ According to Weyerman, one of Gillig's patrons once complained that her portrait, on which he was working, did not at all resemble her but noted that it was a perfect likeness of her cousin. The portraitist responded laughingly: 'Well, that is a fortunate coincidence, dear lady, keep it for your cousin then, for I do not care who it looks like, as long as I can spend my fee'. Notwithstanding this choice bit of gossip, Gillig regularly painted fish still lifes well into the 1690s, thus even when their production elsewhere had all but ceased.

³⁶ Weyerman 1729/69, vol. 2, pp. 283-284. In addition to Alexander Adriaenssen, whom he mentions as a painter of flowers and fruit, Gillig is the only specialised fish painter Weyerman – himself painter of floral still lifes – included in his biographical survey, which we could interpret as a sign of the eighteenth century's contempt for this type of still life. Gillig presumably owed his inclusion solely to the amusing anecdote regarding his activity as a portraitist.

The German-born Abraham Mignon settled in Utrecht in the mid-1660s and was accepted into the workshop of Jan Davidsz. de Heem (1606-1683/84), one of the major Dutch masters of seventeenth-century still-life painting.³⁷ Mignon was among the few artists able to approximate De Heem's calibre. An exceptional painting among his oeuvre reveals that he also responded to Gillig's fish still lifes. **fig. 37** The signature on that work, 'JG AM.fecit', confirms that Mignon derived the composition from Gillig. The level of Mignon's highly refined execution, however, surpasses Gillig's.

³⁷ De Heem was born in Utrecht, but moved at a young age to Leiden and subsequently built up a successful career in Antwerp, painting ornate still lifes of fruit, costly objects and flowers. He worked again in Utrecht as of the early 1660s, until the French invasion in 1672 prompted him to return to Antwerp.

Amsterdam, Alkmaar, Hoorn and Haarlem

While in Utrecht and The Hague there was a consistent production of fish still lifes from the moment the genre began to gain popularity in the 1630s, they were painted only sporadically in other cities. This certainly applies to Amsterdam, which was one of the most vital centres of seventeenth-century Dutch painting in general. For Elias Vonck, who was active there and specialised in game still lifes, images of fish were a subsidiary



fig. 37 Abraham Mignon, *Fish still life in a niche*.
Oil on canvas, 74,5 x 61 cm. Private collection, USA

interest. The same holds true for his son Jan Vonck. No dated fish still lifes by Elias Vonck are known, but he probably painted them after his sojourn in Poland, from where he had returned by 1639. There is a distinct correspondence between Vonck's fish still lifes and his game pieces: the fish are

presented as 'booty' or as food displayed on a counter awaiting preparation for consumption. **fig. 38** In addition, and with far greater originality, he sometimes depicted a few fish together with a live lobster and some crabs, as though they had just washed ashore, *étonnés de se trouver ensemble*, as it were. **fig. 39**

Jan Vonck obviously followed in his father's footsteps, but generally he simplified his compositions. This becomes evident when we compare a still life by him from 1657 **fig. 40** with a painting by his father. Jan barely varied the compositions of his fish still lifes and does not appear to have been greatly inspired by the subject.

Abraham van Beijeren spent five years (from 1669 to 1674) in Amsterdam, but whether he also painted fish still lifes there is unknown – in any case,



fig. 38 Elias Vonck, *Fish still life with dead birds and entrails*.

Oil on panel, 106 x 75 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague



fig. 39 Elias Vonck, *A lobster, fish and a crab on a beach*. Oil on panel, 49.5 x 73.5 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

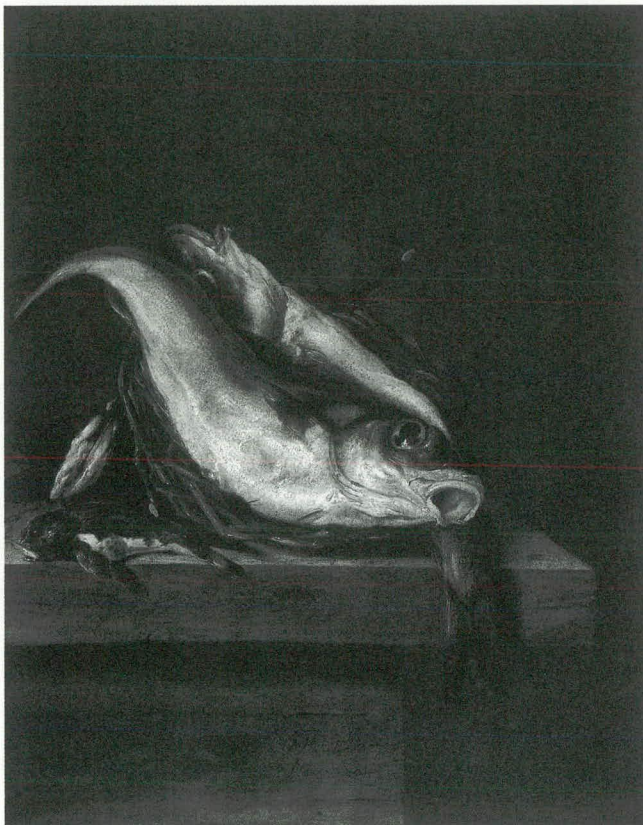


fig. 40 Jan Vonck, *Fish still life*, 1657. Oil on panel, 75 x 60 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

there are no known dated works from those years. Conceivably, the Amsterdam public was more interested in his sumptuous still lifes even though, again, there are no known dated examples from his Amsterdam years. The Amsterdam inventories and other documents that I consulted only contain a few mentions of fish still lifes, including but three Van Beijerens, two of which were in the collections of painters. One was owned by the portraitist Michiel van Musscher (1645-1705), and the other was in the estate of Alexander Roswel (1633/36-1680).³⁸ These artists may well have appreciated Van Beijeren's works foremost for their painterly qualities and not in first place for their subject matter.

Other Amsterdam artists who occasionally painted fish are Wallérant Vaillant (cat. no. 42) and Jacomo Victors. The latter's main subject was living poultry, pigeons and ducks. His birds are occasionally shown being harassed by a cat, the same one found in a fish still life, thus allowing it to be identified as a work by Victors. *fig. 41*

By and large, the fish still life does not seem to have been a very popular genre in Amsterdam. Another kind of still life in which fish play an important role, the 'herring banquet', however, enjoyed great acclaim there. This type appears to have been chiefly initiated by Willem van Aelst (1627- in or after 1683), upon his return from Italy in 1656. He imposed the elegant style he had developed in Paris and Florence on an earlier type of still life in which a prepared herring, ready for consumption, is the focal motif. Similar still lifes were painted by Pieter Claesz. and others in Haarlem (see below).³⁹ Van Aelst combined the silvery skin of the herring with equally shimmering costly silver objects and wine glasses, grouping them together in a dark corner, where they catch just enough light to come alive with their glistening reflections. *fig. 42* In such pictures the herring is usually represented together with the bread and onion or shallots consumed with it. Sometimes a piece of fruit is included. The atmosphere of luxury emanating from such still lifes contrasts strongly with the 'plain' appearance of regular fish still lifes and it is quite clear why this type of painting was favoured by the wealthy Amsterdam upper class.

³⁸ The inventories I consulted were either published by Abraham Bredius in Bredius 1915-1922, or included in his archival notes at the RKD (see note 2). The painting by Van Beijeren was in the inventory drawn up in July 1681, seven months after Roswell's death, where it is simply listed as a work by Van Beijeren. In the inventory of his widow, however, which was notarised on 2 March 1686 by notary J. de Heere in Amsterdam, it is described as a painting 'in which big fish have been painted'. Van Musscher's 'Fish by Van Beijeren' was appraised at 16 guilders in 1699 (Bredius 1915-1922, p. 990).

³⁹ In a work by Gerret Heda of 1646 (sale London (Phillips) 5 December 1990, lot 66, ill. in colour) the cut herring is portrayed in a way not dissimilar to that in Van Aelst's later still lifes, but the surrounding objects are less luxurious and elaborate and the lighting is plain and indifferent, so that Van Aelst's 'mysterious shimmering' is totally absent here.

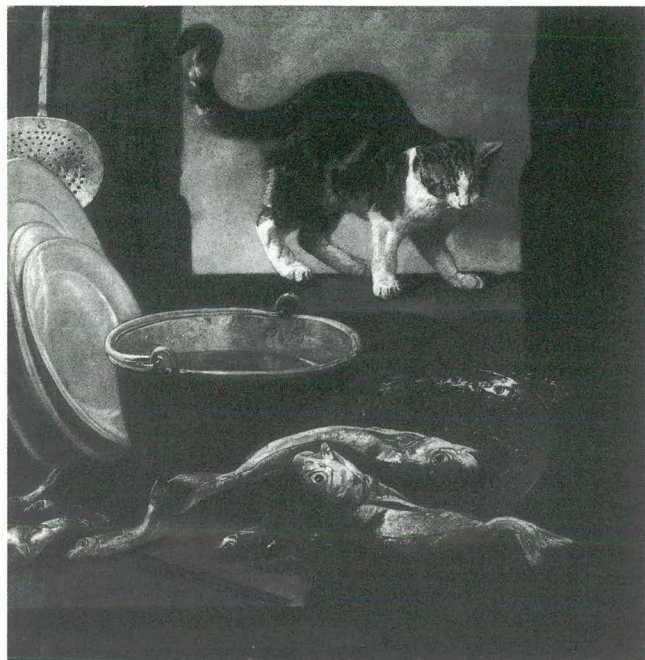


fig. 41 Jacomo Victors,
Fish still life with a cat.
Oil on canvas, 111 x 104.5 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

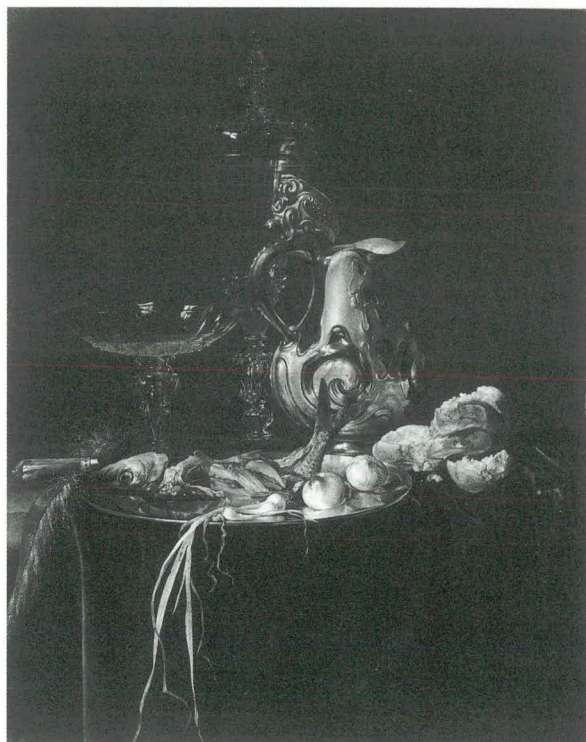


fig. 42 Willem van Aelst, *Herring banquet*, 1657. Oil on canvas,
58 x 46 cm. Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst

After leaving Amsterdam in 1674, Abraham van Beijeren briefly lived in Alkmaar before moving on to Gouda, where he also did not remain for very long. He ultimately settled in Overschie, near Rotterdam, in 1677, living and working there for the next 13 years. As far as we know, there were no other fish still-life painters in Gouda and Overschie. In Alkmaar, on the other hand, Pieter van Schaeyenborgh produced a fair number of quality fish still-lives long before Van Beijeren came onto the scene. Van Schaeyenborgh joined the Alkmaar painters' guild in 1635 and died there in or after 1657. Earlier, in 1610, a Peeter Schaeyenborch was registered as an apprentice in Antwerp, but there is no firm evidence – pro or con – for identifying him with the later Alkmaar fish still-life specialist. Various compositions by Van Schaeyenborgh, however, do display some affinity with fish still-lives by Alexander Adriaenssen.⁴⁰ Still lifes with fish on the beach by Van Schaeyenborgh, like the one recently acquired by the municipal museum in Alkmaar, *fig. 43* may also bespeak other influences, for instance early examples of this type by Abraham van Beijeren or Jan de Bont (cf. cat. no. 28).⁴¹ Many of Van Schaeyenborgh's still lifes (unsigned, or divested of their signature) have appeared under numerous names on the art market. In itself, this is indicative of his wide-ranging oeuvre which is still riddled with questions. Nevertheless, Pieter van Schaeyenborgh must be counted among the major masters of seventeenth-century Dutch fish still life. His work seems to have been appreciated beyond the borders of Alkmaar as well. It would be interesting to know how five of his fish still lifes entered into the collection of the keeper of the Rotterdam shooting hall, Johan van Hesseroy, in whose estate they were in 1671.⁴² Another work by Van Schaeyenborgh was in a Leiden collection.⁴³

The harbour of Hoorn, north of Amsterdam, on the (former) Zuider Zee, was mainly involved in sea trade, but the town also had a fishing fleet. Although not many fish still lifes were painted in Hoorn, two of the most splendid examples do in fact come from there. *figs. 44 and 45* These unusually large paintings of high quality are the only two fish pieces known in the

⁴⁰ In view of my observations regarding Adriaenssen, especially his relatively late start as a painter of fish, would lead to a chronological discrepancy were we to assume that Adriaenssen's influence on Van Schaeyenborgh had to have taken place (well) before 1635.

⁴¹ The absence of dates on such beach scenes with fish makes it difficult to determine who initiated this type of imagery. Ormea's early examples are stylistically fundamentally different from those by Van Beijeren and Van Schaeyenborgh, while Jan de Bont's interpretation too was quite different.

⁴² Bredius' archival notes at the RKD, 'Oud-Hollandse Kunstinventarissen', 1671. The estate of 'Johan van Hesseroy, in his lifetime (inn) keeper of the building of the shooters of St George', contained five paintings that were described as 'fish' and 'small fish' by Van Schaeyenborgh, two of which were valued at 12 guilders, one at 6 guilders and two at 3 guilders. The highest estimate in this fairly substantial collection (some 35 paintings with attributions and an unspecified number of anonymous works) was for a 'peasant meal' by (Adriaen) Brouwer (50 guilders), while several landscapes and 'fires' by (Egbert) van der Poel were appraised at an average of 12 guilders.

⁴³ In 1667 the fairly lavish estate of Sara de Witte included 'a fish done by Schayenburch', Bredius 1915-1922, p. 1237.



fig. 43 Pieter van Schaeyenborgh, *The haddock*. Oil on canvas, 108.9 x 173 cm.
Alkmaar, Stedelijk Museum. © Stedelijk Museum Alkmaar, photo Berend Ulrich

oeuvre of the still-life painter Johannes Fabritius, the younger brother of the far more famous Barent and Carel Fabritius. He also made a still life of dead birds in a landscape in an equally large format, but his favoured subjects seem to have been flowers and fruit. While there are no indications that Johannes worked outside of the province of North-Holland, his fish still lifes were distinctly influenced by Utrecht models: the one with sea fish by Jan de Bont and the one with freshwater fish by Jacob Gillig. If it did not bear a signature, the latter painting could be mistaken for an exceptionally fine work by Gillig. Given Gillig's period of activity, this correspondence indicates that both paintings originated somewhat later in Fabritius' career, perhaps in the 1680s.⁴⁴

Around the same time, or perhaps even a little later, Matthias Withoos, who had settled in Hoorn in 1672, painted a few scenes of fish spread out on one of the quays of that town (cat. no. 49).

⁴⁴ Fabritius' large game still life is dated 1678, while one of his paintings of flowers and fruit bears the date 1691.

Haarlem was indubitably one of the most important centres of still-life painting in Holland for most of the seventeenth century. No fish are to be found in the early ornate banquets by Floris van Dijck (c. 1575-1651) and Nicolaes Gillis (active 1612-in or after 1632), but Floris van Schooten did include

fig. 44 Johannes Fabritius,
Still life of sea fish.

Oil on canvas, 112 x 150 cm.
Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario



fig. 45 Johannes Fabritius,
Still life of freshwater fish.

Oil on canvas, 111.1 x 150.8 cm.
Private collection.
Photo: RKD, The Hague



fish early on in his kitchen and market scenes. **fig. 19, p. 35** In the 1620s Pieter Claesz. developed a modest kind of banquet still life, often referred to as 'breakfast piece' (*ontbijtje*). Often playing a central role in such paintings is a cut herring, a grilled carp or a seasoned pink slice of fish. Claesz.'s example was followed by his fellow townsman Willem Claesz. Heda (c. 1596-1680) and several of Heda's pupils, including Gerret Heda (active 1642-1649) and Maerten Boelema 'the Mute' (1611-in or after 1644). Particularly in the 1630s, Pieter Claesz. and Willem Heda achieved a sublime simplicity in their work, both in colour and composition. While not pure fish still lifes, their prominent inclusion of fish warrants illustration here of a superb example, a small herring banquet by Claesz. **fig. 46** Only much later in his career, during the 1650s, did Claesz. make several genuine fish still lifes (cat. no. 48). Few other Haarlem painters were attracted to the subject, with the exception of Joseph de Bray perhaps, even though his still lifes 'in praise of the salted herring' (cat. no. 47) can hardly count as fish still lifes.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ In addition to Claesz., the total for Haarlem is: one fish still life by 'Deymans' (probably Salomon de Bray's pupil Jacob Deyman); a fish still life formerly in a Polish collection signed 'G.V. Deurs' that may also be a Haarlem work; and finally a fish still life by a certain Adriaen Plancken that was recorded in a Haarlem inventory.



fig. 46 Pieter Claesz., *Herring banquet*, 1636. Oil on panel 36 x 49 cm.

Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen. © Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

Other cities in Holland

Pieter Legouch was recorded in Delft in 1648. He hailed from Antwerp and would later move to Middelburg. While his only known fish still life (ill. p. 414) may not have been painted in Delft, other artists there did treat this genre. For example, though known for his architectural images, Pieter Bronchorst's signature has also been identified on a still life of a few sea fish. (ill. p. 402) This painting probably originated in the (early) 1640s, as did the only known fish piece by his fellow townsman Abraham Vosmaer (cat. no. 43). Both artists may have been influenced somewhat by Cornelis Jacobsz. Delff (1570/71-1643), who had begun painting kitchen still lifes – sometimes with fish – in Delft prior to 1610. **fig. 47**

Highly recognisable in style and working method are the works of Harmen Steenwijck. Several of his still lifes of foodstuffs and kitchen utensils feature fish so prominently that they may rightly be called fish still lifes (cat. nos. 43 and 44). An exceptional work qua dimensions, type and quality is Steenwijck's large canvas of a fish stall with three figures that was probably painted in the early 1640s.⁴⁶ **fig. 48** The luxuriantly bearded fish seller appears to be praising his wares which consist of a motley assortment of sea and freshwater fish and, curiously, a dead rabbit. This combination of fish and rabbits

⁴⁶ The painting was on the Dutch art market in the 1960s and offered in a sale at Koller in Zurich, 25 October/10 November 1979. It has been suggested that the figures were by Steenwijck's teacher David Bailly, but in my opinion they were painted by Steenwijck himself.



fig. 47 Cornelis Jz. Delff, *Kitchen still life*. Oil on panel, 85 x 143 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

is not unique, incidentally, and is also found in some paintings by Abraham van Beijeren (see cat. no. 20). To a degree Steenwijck's market seems to be a precursor of Emanuel de Witte's *Fish market at eventide* (cat. no. 61), in which the selection of fish, however, is more true to life.

One wonders whether Van Beijeren's decision to move from The Hague to Delft in 1657 was informed by the fact that at the time there were no longer any painters there who could meet the local demand for fish still lifes, while he did face competition in the person of Isaac van Duijnen in The Hague. Or was he simply attempting to escape his Hague creditors? Given that Delft and The Hague were not that far apart, perhaps neither reason was instrumental. Whatever the case may be, in 1663 he took off in the opposite direction leaving Delft devoid of any specialised fish still-life painter. He may have been succeeded in this capacity by Anthonie van Isendoorn, who joined the guild there in 1669. Although recorded as having painted fish, not a single work by the artist can be identified today.

As mentioned above, Van Beijeren eventually settled in Overschie near Rotterdam. Even though it already was an important sea port, Rotterdam apparently did not have a strong market for fish still lifes. Gerrit van Vucht (c. 1610-1697), who is thought to have worked there early on in the 1630s and 1640s, painted a substantial number of stylistically clearly distinguishable



fig. 48 Harmen Steenwijck, *Fish stall*. Oil on canvas, 115 x 232 cm.

Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

still lifes. His objects make the impression of having been reduced and as being part of the inventory of a doll's house. Van Vucht settled in nearby Schiedam in or before 1658. As he did not date his work it is virtually impossible to establish a chronology of his oeuvre. Consequently, we cannot determine where he painted the few small still lifes that can rightly be labelled fish pieces. **fig. 49**

Also in Rotterdam, the landscape painter Gerrit Battem produced farm interiors that include fish, as well as a rather idiosyncratic fish still life.⁴⁷ (ill. p. 397) Fish are an important element in a genre scene by Battem that recently appeared on the art market and they markedly add to the scene's rather explicit sexual tenor.⁴⁸ **fig. 50**

Another landscape painter producing fish pieces in (or near) Rotterdam was Pieter van Mase, also called Van Maes or Masius. Little is known about this artist, but the quality of his few fish still lifes is rather high and generally

⁴⁷ It is difficult to ascertain what influences dominate Battem's work. There seems to have been some Hague influence (Van Beijeren and De Putter), as well as some correspondence with the work of Jan de Bont, which could be explained by Battem's sojourn in Utrecht in 1668.

⁴⁸ Sale London (Bonhams) 10 July 2002, lot 306 (ill. in colour).

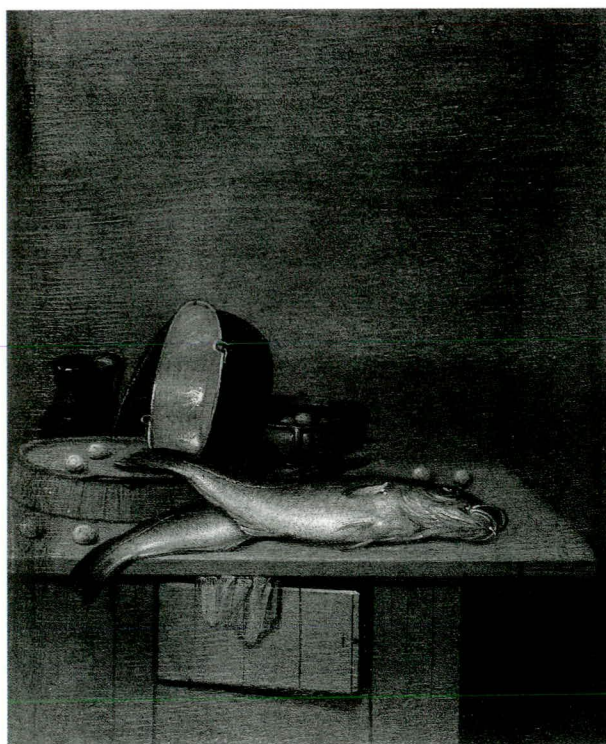


fig. 49 Gerrit van Vucht, *Still life of fish*. Oil on panel, 23 x 17.5 cm.
P. de Boer Gallery, Amsterdam



fig. 50 Gerrit Battem,
*Fish on a ledge, with a man
and a young woman.*
Oil on panel, 35 x 29.5 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague



fig. 51 Pieter van Mase, *Fish still life on a beach.* Oil on canvas, 119 x 167 cm.
St Petersburg, Hermitage

better than his landscapes and genre scenes. They betray the influence of Van Duijnen and Van Beijeren. The latter's signature was probably added at a later date to a painting in the Hermitage in St Petersburg, [fig. 51](#) which after comparison with Van Mase's work in Los Angeles (ill. p. 416) can be recognised as being by him.

Situated at the junction of three important rivers, Dordrecht interestingly also did not lay claim to all that many fish still-life painters. One of the few representatives of the genre is Isaac van Duijnen, who spent his early years there. Van Duijnen's family was important in the local fish trade and one wonders to what extent the family business influenced the young artist's choice of subject matter. In any case, he will have had a continuous supply of fresh models at his disposal.

While not a proper fish still life, one of the best-known Dutch paintings of a fish market was produced by Jacob Gerritsz. Cuyp (1594-1652) in Dordrecht in 1627. [fig. 52](#) The identical tub of freshwater fish seen in this



[fig. 52](#) Jacob Gerritsz. Cuyp, *Fish market*, 1627.

Oil on canvas, 110.5 x 122.5 cm. Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum

work also features in two kitchen still lifes by the artist from around the same time.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ See Meijer 2002.

Well before Isaac van Duijnen travelled to Rome and subsequently settled in The Hague, Abraham Susenier moved from The Hague to Dordrecht. Painted in 1661, his only known fish still life suggests that he was well acquainted with Van Duijnen's early fish pieces, realised in Dordrecht. **fig. 53**

Leiden, finally, remained virtually devoid of specialised fish painters throughout the seventeenth century. While Pieter van Noort (see below) spent his early years there, we have no evidence that he was already painting fish at that time. Nevertheless, Leiden inventories reveal that fish still lifes did enjoy a certain measure of popularity there. We encounter works by Abraham van Beijeren, Pieter van Schaeyenborgh (the work mentioned above) and especially Pieter de Putter. The presence of these paintings in Leiden can perhaps be explained by the fact that the city did not have a St Luke's Guild until 1648, which issued protective regulations making it difficult for artists from other cities to sell their work there.

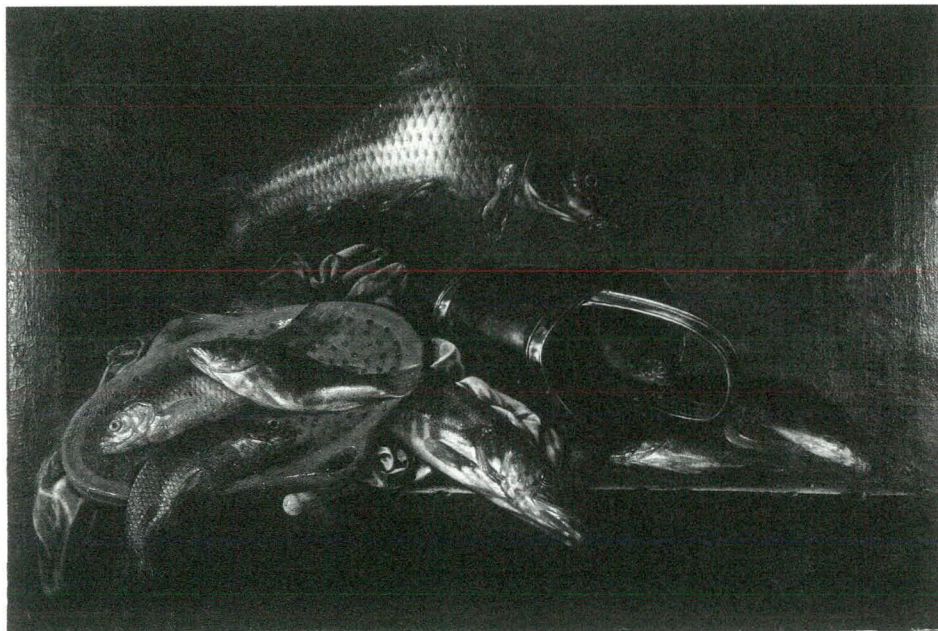


fig. 53 Abraham Susenier, *Fish still life*, 1661. Oil on canvas, 69.7 x 101 cm.

Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague

Outside of Holland

Because of its geographical location, Middelburg (in the province of Zeeland) has always occupied an exceptional place in Dutch painting, even though distinct outside influences, particularly from nearby Antwerp, can be distinguished. The only painter from Middelburg to make fish still lifes was François Ryckhals. He worked in Dordrecht for a few years early on in his career, but his fish still lifes probably all originated in Middelburg, where he had returned to by 1638. We know of two dated fish still lifes by him from 1642 and 1643 (cat. no. 50), and in the background of another work – which includes sharks and a ray – is a view of Flushing, located just a short distance from Middelburg. [fig. 54](#)

The only other painter of a fish still life recorded in Middelburg is Pieter Legouch, who trained in Antwerp, worked in Delft for some time, and who joined the Middelburg guild in 1651. His only known fish still life (one of two known works by him, ill. p. 414) is dated 16[5]7 and thus most likely originated in Middelburg. It is vaguely reminiscent of Alexander Adriaenssen's work, betraying Legouch's Antwerp origin.

Probably born in Leiden, Pieter van Noort left there shortly after joining the recently founded St Luke's Guild in 1648. He appears to have settled in Zwolle in 1652, where he worked until his death 20 years later. His fish still lifes have much in common with his game still lifes: both present the animals as booty, as a trophy (cat. no. 52). This is particularly clear in several paintings in which Van Noort depicted a fisherman proudly pouring out his catch from his nets for all to admire. In an exemplary work in Zwolle, a fisherman tips his catch from a barrel right next to some game already proudly on display, the hunter's gun all but symbolically erect amidst the dead birds, rabbits and a hare. [fig. 55](#) Without exception, Van Noort painted freshwater fish, which is not so strange when one considers Zwolle's location along the IJssel River.



fig. 54 François Ryckhals, *Fish still life with Flushing in the background*.

Oil on canvas, size unknown. Present whereabouts unknown. Photo: RKD, The Hague



fig. 55 Pieter Dz. van Noort, *A fisherman depositing fish next to a display of game*.

Oil on canvas, 147 x 219 cm. Municipality of Zwolle Collection

In contrast, the only known fish still life by another Zwolle painter, Hendrick ten Oever, prominently features a single sea fish, a lumpsucker (cat. no. 54).

In Groningen, in the north, only one artist seems to have produced the occasional fish still life, namely Frans Kerkhoff, about whom next to nothing is known. On the basis of his few still lifes, he appears to have randomly paraphrased the work of other artists: his game still lifes were informed by the Amsterdammer Jan Vonck, and his fish still life seems to have been inspired by Pieter van Noort. After losing its signature, the latter painting even resurfaced on the art market with an attribution to Van Noort.⁵⁰ (ill. p. 412)

⁵⁰ Sale Amsterdam (Sotheby's)
6 May 1996, lot 58 (ill.).

In Leeuwarden, the other provincial capital in the north, some fish may have been painted by Julius de Geest who trained for a while in The Hague, as mentioned above. In general, however, there was little to no interest in fish still lifes in those areas.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

From the above, The Hague and Utrecht emerge as the two most important centres of fish still life painting in the seventeenth century. Antwerp may also be added to this list, though there fish still lifes were painted by a number of individual artists who practiced this genre in their own specific manner, often as a diversion, while in Utrecht and especially The Hague one can truly speak of local schools of fish still-life painting. In fact, two schools can even be distinguished for The Hague: that of Pieter de Putter for still lifes of freshwater fish, and that of Abraham van Beijeren for sea fish. Both appear to have been a local phenomenon, although Van Beijeren's work was emulated elsewhere to some extent, perhaps as a consequence of his numerous peregrinations.

In Utrecht the compositions of fish on a beach devised by Ormea and the Willaerts family enjoyed a certain following; Utrecht's most productive fish painter in the second half of the seventeenth century, Jacob Gillig, also initially worked in this manner.

Other types of still life were often painted by one or more artists in the same place and at the same time. For example, a group of painters produced 'monochrome banquets' in Haarlem in the 1640s, just as various artists made sumptuous still lifes in the style of Jan Dz. de Heem in Antwerp. In contrast, fish still lifes were seldom produced by more than a single painter at the same time, even in the larger centres. **fig. 56** Clearly, even if some towns had a steady market for fish still lifes, it was not substantial. And, while Weyerman's account of Jacob Gillig's digression into portraiture (see p. 52) may stretch the truth somewhat, it does seem to confirm the fish painter's rather weak market position. Both Abraham van Beijeren and Pieter de Putter appear to have accrued numerous debts. It has been argued that this was because their work was not appreciated, however this is belied by their considerable output and their inclusion in many seventeenth-century estate inventories. To be sure, though, the prices their works commanded were generally not very high. Unfortunately, prices and estimates are rarely given in contemporary sources, and the accompanying descriptions are summary and hardly afford a proper image of the paintings. What is obvious, is that the dimensions and the degree of elaboration were crucial in setting a price for a painting.

The sums paid for the two fish still lifes by Pieter van Schaeyenborgh of 1656 and 1657 for Johan van Nordingen's almshouse (cat. no. 40), 48 and 42 guilders respectively, appear to have been exceptionally high. In the 1671 Rotterdam estate mentioned above, two paintings by Van Schaeyenborgh

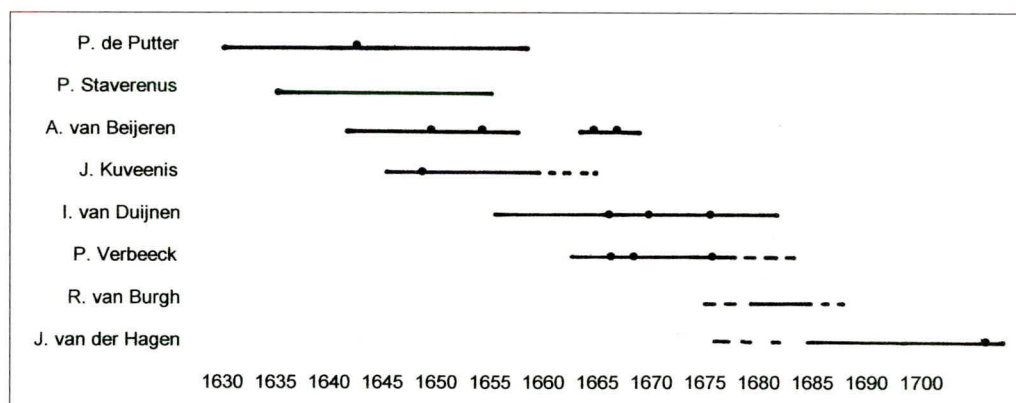


fig. 56 Diagram of the fish still life painters active in The Hague in the seventeenth century. The dots represent dated paintings.

were valued at 12 guilders (described as 'fish', and most likely large works), one at 6 guilders ('fish'), and two at 3 guilders ('little fish', probably small paintings).⁵¹ Many paintings in this estate (landscapes, portraits, biblical and genre scenes) were awarded higher estimates. In 1651 'a fish piece' by Pieter de Putter was valued at 8 guilders, while in 1672 a 'piece' by De Putter was valued at 7 guilders and 5 stivers. A 'little piece' by Van Beijeren was estimated at 5.4.- guilders in 1671 and 'a little fish by Van Beijeren' at 9.12.- guilders in 1687. At the auction of Van Beijeren's estate in 1690, the 99 (!) paintings fetched 466 guilders – an average of a little less than 5 guilders a piece.⁵² These works were not specified in the auction list, and so we have no clue as to their subject matter or even whether they were all by Van Beijeren himself.

⁵¹ See note 42.

⁵² Helbers 1928.

In 1675 or 1676 Isaac van Duijnen sold a work by one of his pupils – 'one of my worst disciples' – for 5 guilders to the Hague auctioneer Hendrick Broeckman. Broeckman extolled it at auction as 'such a wonderful piece by Van Duijnen' and ultimately sold it for 17 guilders to the treasurer Mr Van der Does. After consulting Van Duijnen, and learning of his deception, Van der Does promptly lodged a complaint against the auctioneer. That 17 guilders would have been about the right price for an autograph work by Van Duijnen is borne out by the fact that a few years later, in 1679, a painting by him was valued at 12 guilders in a Hague estate and subsequently sold for 14 guilders.

Interestingly, fish still lifes (probably) by Rochus van Burgh, now considered the equivalent of Van Duijnen's 'worst disciples', were valued at prices ranging from 6.7.- guilders to 11.1.- guilders in a 1687 Leiden estate inventory, while the 'little fish' by Van Beijeren in the same estate, as mentioned above, was assessed at 9.12.- guilders.

The number of compositions for fish still lifes is limited. Depicted indoors, the fish were usually displayed on a table, either as a catch – analogous to hunting trophies – or as food, ready to be prepared or during preparation, in combination with other foodstuffs. Depicted outdoors, the fish were prima-

rily presented as a catch, either on the beach (sea fish) or in a landscape (freshwater fish). Particularly in the case of sea fish this catch was often displayed as a commodity, occasionally with the fish seller standing by, or with images of the fish trade in the background.

Apart from the two or three 'schools' of fish painting mentioned above, the majority of fish still-life painters seem to have found their own ways within these compositional types when depicting fish, rather than emulating or imitating the work of others. The limited possibilities for representing this subject sometimes resulted in marked resemblances between the work of various otherwise unrelated artists. The fact that many fish still lifes are unsigned, or have lost their signature in the course of time – occasionally in order to be replaced with the false signature of a better-known artist – does not facilitate the demarcation of the oeuvres of the many artists who hazarded this subject. Nevertheless, the growing interest in the fish still life and the surfacing of previously unknown, reliably signed paintings throughout the last half century, allow an ever clearer image to emerge of the history and the production of fish still lifes in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century.

The substantial production of fish still lifes, especially around the third quarter of the seventeenth century, bespeaks their popularity. That this appreciation eventually waned is attested to by the following remark by the painter-theorist Gerard de Lairese, who writing about still lifes in his 1707 *Groot Schilderboek*, advocated: 'As for cabbages, carrots and turnips, as well as cod, salmon, herring, smelt and similar things, which are poor and common decorations, not worth being hung indoors in rooms, we will pass them by: those who like them are advised to go to the market.'⁵³

⁵³ De Lairese 1740, vol. 2, p. 260.

However, those who are prepared to ignore the disdain of De Lairese and later generations and open their eyes instead to the painterly qualities of these glistening works, will experience just as much pleasure as the Dutch and Flemish did at the time. 

Bouillabaisse for Rob Scheller

**THE SYMBOLISM OF FISH,
FISHERMAN, FISHING GEAR
AND THE CATCH**

Eddy de Jongh



fig. 1 Frans Snijders and Cornelis de Vos, *Fish market*.

Oil on canvas, 225 x 365 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

Three and a half centuries ago, in July 1652, the Amsterdam spice dealer and poet Jan Six van Chandelier poetically invited a number of friends for a fish repast – ‘to gnaw on a heap of fish in our garden’.¹ Reading the preserved invitation, ‘Fish repast, to Manuel Spranger’ (among the guests), one is struck by the sheer realism of Six’s lines of verse. Avoiding symbolic phrases, metaphors or erudite comparisons he gives a detailed summation of what seafood and delicacies from the inland waterways were available at the time, a plenitude from which he proposed to make a selection for the evening in question: ‘turbot, salmon, and perch [...], with bream, herring, ruff, sole, crab, and occasionally lobster...’.

The salt- and freshwater fish and other creatures considered to be members of the Fish family in the Middle Ages and early modern period were extraordinarily varied. An urge for clearly demarcated categories manifested itself neither in daily life nor in the language of self-appointed zoologists. Not only mammals such as sperm whales and dolphins, but also lobsters, crabs, shrimp, oysters and mussels were by far not always strictly distinguished from fish proper. ‘Of the fish enclosed in hard shells,’ wrote Dordrecht’s popular city physician, Johan van Beverwijck, ‘oysters have always been considered the greatest delicacy.’² And the sixteenth-century Scheveningen fish auctioneer and proto-ichthyologist Adriaen Coenen was not the only one to characterise a seal as a fish: ‘this fish has a coarse skin.’³

This liberal taxonomy, moreover, is already evident in the Old Testament, in which – with the exception of whales – all animals living in the water fall under the denominator ‘fish’. Genesis 1:21 speaks of the creation of ‘every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded.’⁴ Fully in keeping with this, many seventeenth-century painters did their utmost to capture as many possible different – seemingly teeming – sea and river inhabitants in a single large group portrait. They expended a great deal of talent devising the composition and rendering the textures – converting into paint the visible slipperiness, moistness, the sheen and shine of scales and whatever else was essential for conveying the appearance of fish (cat. no. 9). **fig. 1**

¹ Van Es 1953, pp. 94-95.
See also Schenkeveld-van der Dussen 1981.

² Beverwijck 1651, p. 141.

³ Egmond 1997, pp. 113-114.

⁴ English quotations from the bible were taken from the 1989 edition of *The New Scofield Study Bible, New King James Version*, Nashville 1989.

NOURISHMENT FOR THE MIND

Anyone assuming on the basis of Six's poem that fish was always written about in such a straightforward fashion, or, on the basis of the pervasive painterly naturalism, that in earlier times fish was just fish in all circumstances, would be sadly mistaken. In the days of Six and his friends, and many centuries prior to them, fish served not only as food for man but was often subject to the irrepressible human desire to elevate things and animals to a symbolic level, and thus in this connection we should perhaps speak of mental nourishment.⁵ Both aspects are pregnantly expressed in a dialogue between a scholar and a fisherman written by the English poet and prose-writer Nicholas Breton in 1597: 'But I pray you sir on with your fishing, and if you have doone with your substantiall, begin with your metaphoricall.'⁶

⁵ See Zajadacz-Hastenrath 1988-1990.

⁶ Breton 1966, p. 8. See also Von Koppenfels 1973, p. 6.



fig. 2 Pieter van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel (H. Cock exc. 1557), *The large fish eat the small fish* (engraving). Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet. © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

The fact that the entry for fish and its compounds counts no fewer than 115 columns (aside from those reserved for the individual species) in the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*, indicates the animal's great significance not only in a biological and culinary respect, but also in a linguistic and cultural-historical sense.⁷ A significance, moreover, which is confirmed by a substantial number of proverbs and sayings, such as the famous 'The large fish eat the small fish' – as illustrated by Bruegel, among others.⁸ **fig. 2** Quite a few fish also swim around in emblems, more than once with an amorous message.⁹ In Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, the handbook for symbolic and allegorical orchestrations, a Dutch translation of which was published in 1644, one or more fish serve as an attribute for an entire constellation of noteworthy personifications, including Deceit, Truce, Amicable Demeanor, the Power of Love and the Oblivion of Love, Simony, Gluttony, Austerity and Indolence. And, of course, Water and the Sea.¹⁰ **figs. 3 and 4**

⁷ *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*, vol. XXI, cols. 986-1101.

⁸ See Harrebomée 1856-1870, pp. 384-386. For the engraving after Bruegel, see Klein 1963, pp. 137-139. Bruegel's depiction of the saying in question had a long pictorial afterlife; on this, see Unverfehrt 1984-1985.

⁹ Henkel & Schöne 1967, cols. 678-738; Luijten 1996, vol. I, pp. 36-41, 126-131, 162-167, 180-185; vol. II, pp. 157-169, 333-345, 406-416, 442-450.

¹⁰ Ripa 1644, pp. 29-31, 46-48, 117-119, 155-156, 266, 457-460, 471, 475, 518-519, 534-535.

FORZA D'AMORE, fi nel Acqua, come
nel Terra. *Kracht der Liefde, soo te Waeter
als te Lande.*



figs. 3 and 4 I.C. Jegher, 'Power of Love' and 'Indolence', woodcuts from Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia, of uytbeeldingen des verstands*, Amsterdam 1644

The explanation for the woman representing Ignorance (*Ignoranza*) in Ripa's book, a lamentable creature with a hopeful perspective, illustrates just how far-fetched and bizarre some symbolic constructions are. The woman is decked out in a robe full of 'fish scales [...] which is the correct image of Ignorance. The reason is because fish are dull by nature, and have no understanding, except for dolphins, and a few others, which are said to be a miracle. And just as the scales can be easily scraped off the fish, so can the practice of the arts [and sciences] also remove the cover of Ignorance from mankind.'¹¹

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 371.

That Ripa chose fish as an attribute for the personification of the element of Water is understandable, and that Neptune and other gods of the sea are involved, equally so.¹² There are virtually countless allegorical illustrations of water featuring fish, [fig. 5](#) but not a single evocation is so fanciful and imaginative as that by the Mannerist painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo.¹³ The head and bust of the personification in question are ingeniously constructed from

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 119.

¹³ Maiorino 1991, pp. 37 and 40.



[fig. 5](#) Philips Galle, *Aqua*, 1564 (engraving, 2nd state).

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet.

© Rijksmuseum Amsterdam



fig. 6 Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Water*.
Oil on panel, 66.5 x 50.5 cm.
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

a staggering array of aquatic animals, mostly fish, including a shark, a young seal, a gargantuan lobster, a turtle, a sea horse, and various shells. **fig. 6**

No matter how curiously depicted by Arcimboldo, who also painted the other three elements in this manner, the subject itself was generally taken very seriously. After all, the theory of the elements stemming from Empedocles (fifth century B.C.) had yet to be cast overboard. Based on philosophical and physiological insights, for centuries the four elements, air, fire, earth and water were coupled with the four temperaments – the sanguine, choleric, melancholic and phlegmatic humours – and moreover with the position of the celestial bodies. The human temperament was believed to be determined by the relationship of the four bodily fluids: blood, mucous (phlegm), yellow bile and black bile, and according to the science of the day the organs from which these fluids issued were greatly influenced by the planets. It should be remembered that the astrological conception of life, a phenomenon Christianity could kerb only to a limited degree, was still a matter of course for much of the population in the sixteenth and seventeenth century.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ripa 1644, pp. 120-121. See also Veldman 1983, Veldman 1986, pp. 67-87; and Porteman 1987, pp. 46-50; Salman 1999, pp. 41-102; and Jorink 1999, pp. 14-15, 45-48. Relevant in this connection is also Den Bosch/Louvain 2002.

With respect to water, a close connection was perceived with the moon, thought to spread moisture, and with the phlegmatic temperament. In any case, the moon had planetary dominion over the occupational group of fishermen, which was not favourable in every sense for these 'children of the zodiac'. Fishermen were associated with moisture and cold, and their phlegmatic temperament also afforded them the dubious reputation of being inert, if not downright lazy.¹⁵ However, they were not always portrayed as lethargic or indolent. In an allegorical print by Herman Muller after Maerten van Heemskerck bearing the title *Phlegmatics*, we see how under the influence of the moon fishermen are actually industriously angling and hauling in traps and nets, along with duck hunters who were astrologically related to fishermen.¹⁶ fig. 7 The signs of the zodiac, with Pisces in the middle, are depicted high up in the sky.

¹⁵ Amsterdam 1976, pp. 219-221, and Veldman 1986, pp. 85-86.

¹⁶ Veldman 1993-1994, no. 545.



fig. 7 Herman Jansz. Muller after Maerten van Heemskerck, *The Phlegmatic Temperament*, 1566 (engraving).

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet. © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam



fig. 8 Salvator Rosa, *St Anthony of Padua preaching to the fish*. Oil on canvas, 46 x 66 cm.
Formerly in Althorp Park collection. Photo: Photographic Survey, Courtauld Institute of Art

MYSTERIOUS LIFE

If the human desire to give things and animals, and thus fish as well, a symbolic charge was extremely tenacious in earlier times, we should not shy away from holding the fish themselves as co-responsible for their poly-interpretability. Evidently, this animal was one of those natural phenomena that in cultural terms were exceptionally prone to a vast array of meanings. The symbolic sensitivity of fish, moreover, had consequences for the status of the fishermen, the fishing pole, the bait, the fishing net and the catch, at least in literature and the visual arts.

From an anthropological viewpoint it has also been noted that of all the animals, fish, in a natural *and* an artistic form, are also laden with the most irrational meanings.¹⁷ This could be related to the distinctive fact that fish generally seek out the depths and therefore in some sense lead a mysterious life. Of course, this is not to imply that they are always invisible. In the first half of the thirteenth century there were fish, large and small, that even swam up to the surface, raising their heads above water to listen to the preaching of Saint Anthony of Padua.¹⁸ fig. 8

¹⁷ Hansmann & Kriss-Rettenbeck 1977, p. 264.

¹⁸ As with Salvator Rosa; see Salerno 1963, p. 118. On Saint Anthony of Padua, see Stano 1962 and Casanova 1962.

Not all fish were as innocent as Saint Anthony's listeners, however. Some aquatic animals were even capable of eliciting collective anxiety, clear evidence of which is constituted by the panic engendered by the many sperm whales that washed up along the Dutch coastline. **fig. 9** These sea monsters were generally considered an expression of God's wrath, a harbinger of calamity, or at the very least as a grave divine warning.¹⁹ The account given in a pamphlet dating from 1608 about the stranding of a long-finned pilot whale between Scheveningen and Katwijk is representative of the way in which such a spectacular event was experienced by many in the seventeenth century: 'That there is nothing that transpires in vain and all that does transpire / has its special merit and character / from which to draw God's council / to learn his essence and ourselves / and also immediately punish those / who carelessly observe the works and the miracles of God as being only of temporary value'.²⁰ **fig. 10**

¹⁹ See Sliggers 1992. Compare Jorink 1999, pp. 45-48.

²⁰ Quoted by Sliggers 1992, p. 57.

fig. 9

Anonymous, *Beached sperm whale at Brouwershaven*, 1606.
Oil on canvas, 160 x 260 cm.
Leiden, Naturalis

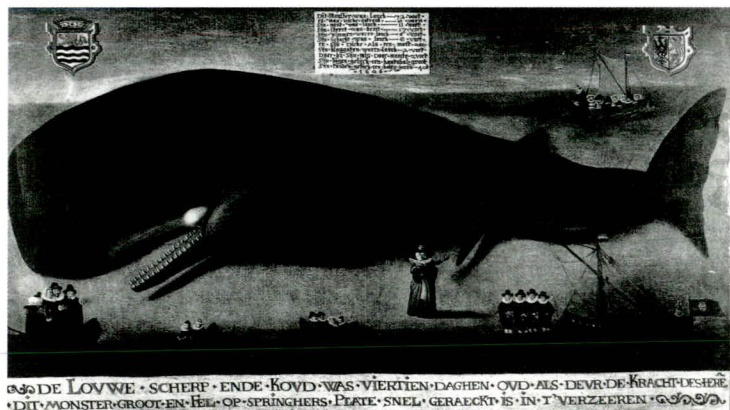
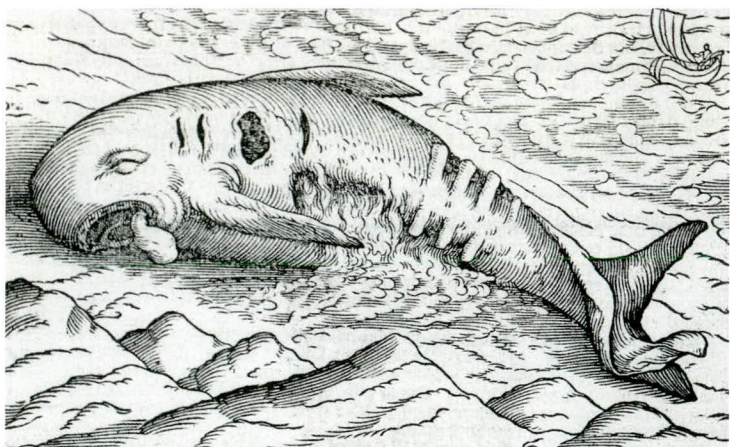


fig. 10

Anonymous,
Beached long-finned pilot whale between Scheveningen and Katwijk.
Woodcut from an anonymous pamphlet,
Middelburg, Adriaan de Vivere, 1608.
Leiden, Naturalis



Generally, there was little fear of aquatic animals whose dimensions were not all too monstrous. In some civilisations fish-shaped objects were even used as amulets or apotropaic charms to ward off evil spirits, or as powerful aids in all manner of peculiar forms of witchcraft. People believed in the existence of fish gods and demons in fish form, imaginary creatures venerated for their magical properties.²¹ **fig. 11** Choosing fish as the image of Christ in the chiefly literary symbolism of early Christianity will likewise have had some antecedents in magic, although this choice was also determined by the fact that the Greek word for fish, *ichthys*, forms the beginning letters of the words *Iêsous Christos Theou Huios Sootër* (Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour).²²

²¹ Benwell & Waugh 1961, pp. 83-85; Hansmann & Kriss-Rettenbeck 1977, pp. 263-264; Egmond 1997, pp. 87-89.

²² The classic book on Christ in relation to fish (and the implications thereof) remains Dölger 1928.

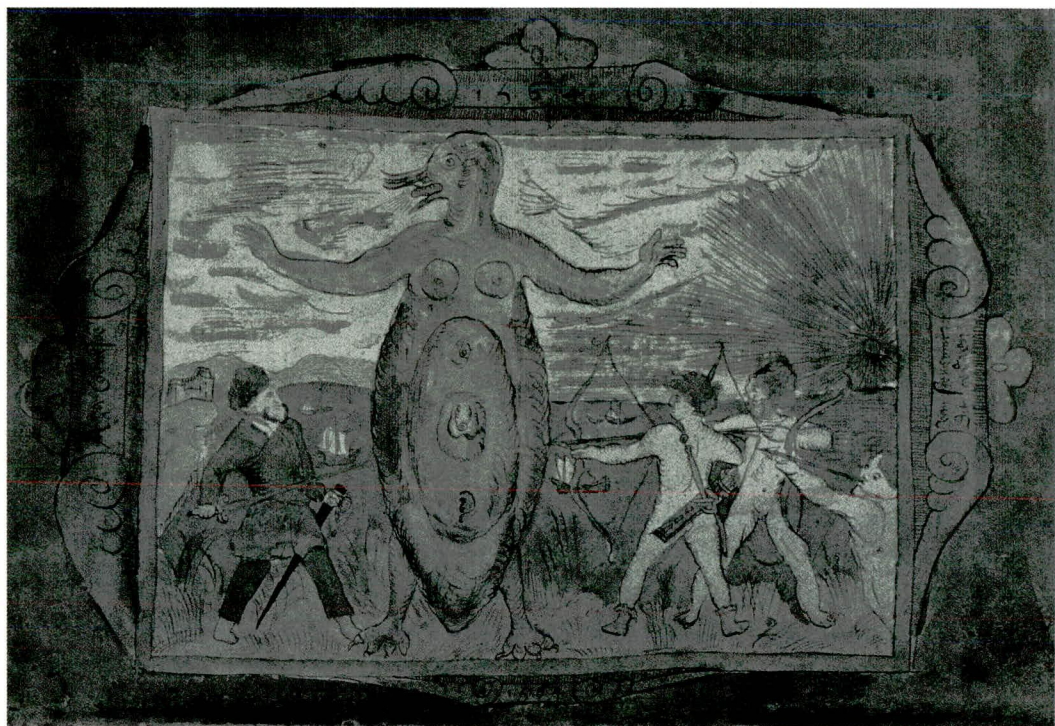


fig. 11 'The Brazilian sea monster of 1564', drawing from Adriaen Coenen, *Visboeck*, 1578. The Hague, Royal Library

PARADOX

Fish and fishing were subject to various tropes. Until now symbols or symbolism have primarily been addressed, however the motifs of the fish, the angler or the catch were also used metaphorically or as a comparison, and the catch is even sometimes presented as a personification.²³ fig. 12 These are forms of – literary and visual – imagery that cannot always be clearly distinguished. Nevertheless, fish symbolising Christ relies on a different kind of mental connection than fish painted with the intention of evoking associations with the economy.

²³ For the rarely occurring personification of the draft of fishes, see Haug 1988-1990.

The symbolic fish are found primarily in works of art with biblical or other religious subject matter, in allegorical representations – as the enumeration in Ripa's *Iconologia* makes clear – in market scenes, in sculptures depicted in certain portraits, as well as in all kinds of pseudo-realistic genre scenes with an erotic content. But then we face a paradox. In those instances where painted fish occur most autonomously and in the greatest concentration, namely in still lifes, they also are the most problematic in terms of symbolism.²⁴ Those interested in probing these images for possible meanings will in any case be sorely disappointed by seventeenth-century sources. The only seventeenth-century art theorist to utter a word about fish still lifes, Gerard de Lairesse, does so in passing and with the greatest possible disdain, making no mention whatsoever of symbolism in this connection.²⁵

²⁴ On the development of Dutch and Flemish fish still lifes, see the essay by Fred G. Meijer in this catalogue, pp. 13-73.

²⁵ De Lairesse 1707, Vol. II, p. 260. See also Auckland 1982, pp. 121-123.

Nowadays, scholars are totally divided on the iconography in this regard. There are researchers who are fully convinced that the painters of market scenes and fish still lifes imbued their creations with a weighty symbolic charge, while others assume that precisely fish still lifes, unlike other kinds of still lifes, are devoid of all symbolism. 'Die üblichen ikonologischen Ausdeutungen werden m. E. hier zur Paranoia,' lamented an art historian commenting on an overblown interpretation of Adriaen van Utrecht's *Fishmonger's stall* by another art historian, which neatly conveys the causticity of the debate (cat. no. 9).²⁶

²⁶ Alexander Wied in Vienna/Essen 2002, p. 194, versus Paul Verbraeken in Ghent 1986-1987, p. 165.



fig. 12 Hans Brüderl after Pieter de Witte (Candid),
Piscatus (personification of the catch), 1613.
 Oil on canvas, 265 x 158 cm. Munich, Bayerische
 Staatsgemäldesammlungen

Both viewpoints are unavoidably speculative, and when in addition to the alleged intentions of the artist we also wish to introduce the perceptions of their contemporaries into the discussion, we are relying no less on speculation. Nonetheless, this is an important aspect, if only because perception and meaning are most tightly intertwined. This perception may have varied from person to person to some degree, but in addition to individual experience, naturally, there was something like a collective or shared experience which, as with so many subjects, was strongly historically determined.

We can properly assume that fish evoked all kinds of fixed, conditioned associations, and it is hard to imagine that this mental mechanism ceased functioning in the contemplation of fish still lifes. However, we can only speculate as to how these associations were structured. We know that certain meanings were attached to certain species of fish, but where do we even begin when faced with a painted heap of dozens of species? Seventeenth-century viewers could not possibly have arrived at a multiplicity of connotations, even should they have been so inclined, and anyway we lack the instrument necessary for deriving any rational meaning from the ingredients for bouillabaisse.

'GOLDEN TRADE'

At the time, a great deal of knowledge, insight and folklore regarding fish and fishing were part of the common body of ideas. This was reinforced by the attendant fact that the catch and its trade were crucial for the economy, an importance that was widely acknowledged and understood if not readily exaggerated in the seventeenth century.²⁷ The herring fleet generally received the greatest accolades. 'Oh, what a golden trade!', exclaimed the young poet Vondel about the catch of 'the royal herring'. And, he added: 'How thousands of souls make a living from this trade, / And earning their daily bread from it, give thanks and praise to God.'²⁸

There was another factor, too, namely what could be called the trading philosophy of fishing in which the fisherman's stature differs somewhat from that of the moon-ruled phlegmaticus typified above. This philosophy filters through the lines in Vondel's *Hymnus, ofte Lof-Gesangh, over de wijd-beroemde scheeps-vaert der Vereenighde Nederlanden*. We are dealing here with a way of thinking about maritime trade that goes back to Aristotle. Just as honesty and 'naturalness' applied to the occupation of farmer and cattle herder, so too for that of fisherman, at least as long as it was aimed at fulfilling the community's essential needs. If the fisherman's primary focus was on gain and on amassing capital, however, he was behaving unnaturally since the pursuit of wealth was considered a reprehensible craving.²⁹

That the work of Aristotle and his followers was not the ship crew's first choice of reading material does not necessarily preclude the fishing fleet from having caught on to some of their notions. But to head into the surging sea with this Aristotelian ethic was perhaps less practical, and so it is not surprising that in the course of time philosophy constructed an emergency exit. Lucrative trade could be morally justified were profit-making not a goal in itself but rather exercised in the public interest or for the sake of other commendable pursuits. This concept, supported by Vondel among others as we have seen, naturally afforded the fishing business the necessary elbow room.³⁰

²⁷ See De Vries & Van der Woude 1995, pp. 284-321.

²⁸ De Vries & Van der Woude 1995, p. 317; *De werken van Vondel*, vol. I, WB-edition, Amsterdam 1927, pp. 427-445, esp. p. 436; and Spies 1987, vol. I, pp. 73-142, vol. II, pp. 32-34. Vondel wrote the first of these two poems, *Hymnus, ofte Lof-Gesangh, over de wijd-beroemde scheeps-vaert der Vereenighde Nederlanden*, in 1613; the oldest known edition dates from nine years later (included in *De vernieuwde gulden winckel der kunstlievende Nederlanders*, Amsterdam 1622).

²⁹ The ethics in question continued, *mutatis mutandis*, in the writings of Thomas of Aquinas and Coornhert, among others, and agree with Vondel's Mennonite convictions. See the illuminating commentaries in Spies 1987, vol. I, pp. 109-121 and vol. II, pp. 32-34, 151-156, with the interesting observation that herring fishery was largely done by Mennonites.

³⁰ Spies 1987, vol. I, pp. 113-117.

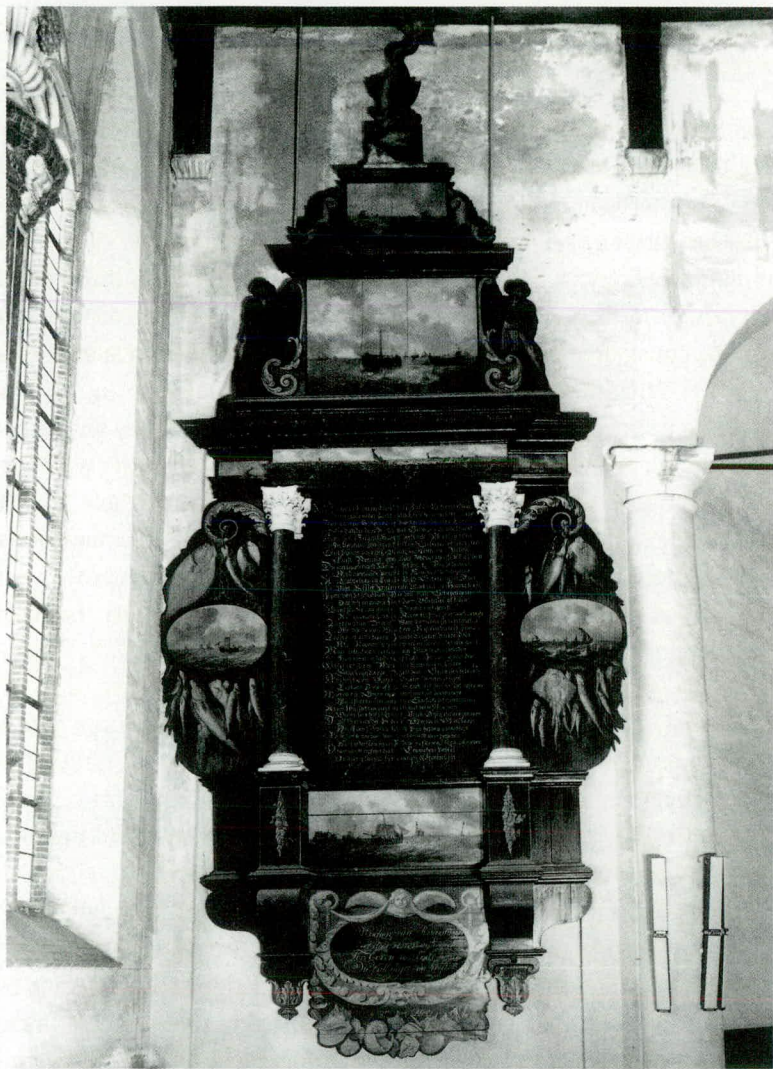


fig. 13 Abraham van Beijeren, *Fishery board*, 1649. Oil on panel, 700 x 300 cm.
Maassluis, Groote Kerk. Photo RKD, The Hague

'SCALY CATTLE'

As Vondel did with words, Joseph de Bray wrought with paint a stunning tribute to herring in an unusual still life of 1656 that includes a witty poem by Jacob Westerbaen entitled *Lof van den Pekelharingh* (cat. no. 47). Fish still lifes are virtually never provided with textual commentary and De Bray's painting is an exception in this regard.³¹ A second exception is the seven-year earlier *Visserijbord* (Fishery Board) by Abraham van Beijeren, which may already be considered unprecedented in terms of its shape, size and iconography. **fig. 13** What may be observed in this monumental work in the Groot Kerk of Maassluis, moreover, is not a 'normal' fish still life, but rather a combination of representations of fishing boats at sea, a still life with shells and four groups of fish draped as festoons.³² The work as a whole is accompanied by a lengthy inscription penned by a local poet, Bartolomeus Brasser, who in all piety drew a direct line between fishing and the Creator. After listing various species of fish the poet moves on to an entreaty that begins with the following lines:

Lord of this scaly cattle, grant us full holds
That we and other men can make a moderate living,
For without Your benevolence, there would be no fishing.
Even were we to work all night, in the morning there would still be nothing.
Teach us then to cast the net and tackle on the right side,
And in accordance with Your word, we will enjoy an abundant catch.^{32a}

^{32a} *Heer van dit schubbich vee,
wil volle schepen geven/ Dat wy
en andere Lien daer Matelick of
leven/ Want sonder uwe gunst en
werter niet gevist/ Al werck men
gans de Nacht 't is smorgens
noch gemist./ Leert ons dan Net
of Want ter rechter syd uyttschie-
ten./ Wy doende nae U woort, een
Rycken vangh genieten.*

For the devout, the value of Van Beijeren's production must not have been vested so much in his artistic achievements, thus in that which one could observe *in concreto*, but primarily in what one could not see: the omnipotence and longed for grace of God projected in the representation by the poet. This, I suspect, was the perception the churchgoers will have shared with one another.

'Scaly cattle' is not the only metaphor in the 36-line poem on the Maassluis Fishery Board. Several other figurative expressions are found in addition to a mention of Jonah swallowed by a whale and a proud reference to the profession itself in the passage 'God's son chose disciples from our people.' Curiously, the poet does not allude to other biblical events in which fishing plays a significant role, nor does he avail himself of the tried and tested metaphor with respect to bait and hook, for which various authors since antiquity evinced a certain preference.

With regard to the latter, the phrase '*esca et hamus* metaphor' has been used, which – in word and image – could be applied in both a favourable and an unfavourable sense and moreover to various realms of human existence.³³ With the right bait, anything and everything could be caught on the hook, not in last place a woman or a lover. Yet one had to guard against 'perilous waters': Roemer Visscher warns an angler bent on both fickle love and wealth of the adverse consequences of such longings.³⁴ fig. 14 This had been done earlier. Cicero had already spoken of the temptations of pleasure (*voluptas*), touching on what Plato had called *esca malorum*, the bait of evil: an expression evidently chosen, according to Cicero, 'because people are caught with it [the bait] like fish.'³⁵

³³ Von Koppenfels 1973.

³⁴ Visscher 1614, p. 150. Jacob Cats in turn warns against a surplus of ambitions via the metaphor of fishermen who want to catch fish that are too big ('Large fish tear the net'): Cats 1632, pp. 60–61.

³⁵ Cicero, *De senectute*, xiii, 44, and Courcelle 1960, pp. 246–247. Compare also Proverbs 12:12: 'The wicked covet the catch of evil men.'



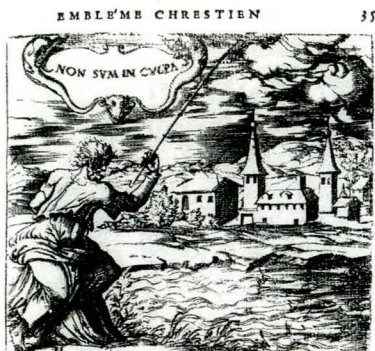
fig. 14 Claes Jansz. Visscher, 'Who knows where?', emblem from Roemer Visscher, *Sinnepoppen*, Amsterdam 1614

As a rule, however, symbolism has several sides: one and the same image could often be interpreted in both a negative and a positive sense. The bait of good also existed – this was the lure of an angler who could glory in the highest moral ground and a spotless life's journey and, naturally, Jesus was the candidate *par excellence*. Whoever bit into his glorious bait counted as a praiseworthy fish.

On the other hand, *esca malorum* exerted its own fascination and the staging of satanical or otherwise wicked characters soon yields an intriguing iconography. **fig. 48, p. 116** To this may be added the bald fact that some fish always willingly and knowingly refuse to bite into virtuous bait, something that has been a continuous source of inspiration for artists and writers.³⁶ The Calvinist French poetess Georgette de Montenay was but one of many who drew on this source, which she did for the sake of her 1571 *Emblemes ou devises chrestiennes*, a volume that would be translated into Dutch several decades later by Anna Roemers Visscher, although it was never published.³⁷ In this case we are dealing with 'a teacher of God's word who does his diligent

³⁶ Von Koppenfels 1973, pp. 39-43.

³⁷ De Montenay 1571, p. 35, and Beets 1881, p. 47.



Son deuoir fait de bien sa ligne tendre,
Et ne s'espargne en chaleur ny frescheur,
Si le poisson l'amorce ne veut prendre,
Coulpable n'est l'engin ny le pecheur.
Ainsi est il du fidele precheur,
Il tend vous prendre à Dieu par la parole:
Mais le cœur dur de l'obstiné pecheur
Se des tournant, la tient comme friuole.

Le

fig. 15 Georgette de Montenay, 'Non sum in culpa', emblem from *Emblemes ou Devises chrestiennes*, Lyon 1571



Gelyk een Visnet aan de Strand,
Soo, secht de Wysheid, sal't ook weesen,
Wanneer des grooten Vissers hand,
Den Vangst der Menseken uitsal leesen;
Het goede in het heemels Vat,
En't quaade in een leelyk Gat.

fig. 16 Jan Luiken, 'The fisherman', emblem from Jan and Caspar Luiken, *Het menselyk bedrijf*, Amsterdam 1694. Amsterdam, Amsterdam's Historisch Museum collection

best' to convert the godless who nevertheless turn a deaf ear to his exhortations. The writer contends that the preacher can do nothing about this: 'The shortcoming lies not with him, but with those who do not believe.' 'Non sum in culpa' (I am not culpable) reads the motto of the emblem, the accompanying image of which shows a resigned angler watching some fish swim away from him. **fig. 15** Where Jesus succeeded, this poor minister failed.

For the sake of a figurative consideration, in addition to a fishing-rod 'amply provided with bait', artists could equally rely on other fishing gear, such as the net or trap. Jan Luiken compared God's final judgment with the effect of a fishing net:³⁸ **fig. 16**

38 Luiken & Luiken 1694, p. 95. The lines quoted are derived from Matthew 13:47-48: 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a drag-net that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind [fish], which, when it was full, they [the fishermen] drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into the vessels, but threw the bad away.' For the various editions of Luiken's emblem book, see Landwehr 1970, nos. 371-382, and Klaversma & Hannema 1999, pp. 357-358.

Like a fishing net on the beach,
So, Wisdom says, it will be
When the almighty Fisherman's hand,
Shall sort the draught of people;
[Consigning] the good to the heavenly vat,
And the evil to an ugly hole.^{38a}

38a *Gelyc een Visnet aan de Strand,/ Soo, secht de Wijsheid, sal't ook weesen,/ Wanneer des grooten Vissers hand, Den Vangst der Mensen uit sal leesen;/ Het goede in het heemels Vat,/ En't quade in een leelyk Gat.*



fig. 17 Cornelis van Dalen after Adriaen van de Venne, *Marriage's trap*, engraving from Jacob Cats, *Alle de wercken*, Amsterdam 1655

While the trap was perhaps somewhat less frequently chosen as an instrument of deception, in 1655 Jacob Cats and his illustrator Adriaen van de Venne nevertheless produced a highly appealing interpretation of it in their *Afbeeldinge van't Huwelyck, en't geen daer omtrent is, onder de gedaente van een Fuyck* (Image of marriage and what it is about, in the shape of a trap).³⁹ Only here the trap in question is out of the water and there is not a fish to be seen. **fig. 17**

³⁹ Cats 1656; bound in with this, with its own title page and pagination: *Afbeeldinge van't Huwelyck, en't geen daer omtrent is onder de gedaente van een Fuyck*. See also Hazelzet 1991.

More than 40 years prior, in 1614, Van de Venne had illustrated another sort of catch metaphor with fishing nets on the water, and here too people take the place of fish. Protestant and Catholic fishermen play a role in this large allegory of the religious and political disputes during the Twelve-Year Truce.⁴⁰ **fig. 18** A number of Protestants occupy boats on the heraldic right side (left for the viewer) and the rather caricaturally typified Catholics are seated in boats on the heraldic left side. A Calvinist, Van de Venne emphatically took up the cudgels for his fellow believers. Accordingly, he placed them on the 'good side' and made it perfectly clear in more ways than one that they held a valid fishing permit and thus the proper lease on truth. He explicitly entitled the religious leaders of the Protestants as 'Evangelic[i] piscatores'. In the seventeenth century his detailed portrayal was characterised as 'the spiritual fishing for human souls'.⁴¹

⁴⁰ See Knuttel 1917.

⁴¹ De Bie 1661, p. 234.



fig. 18 Adriaen van de Venne, *Fishing for souls*, 1614.

Oil on canvas, 98 x 189 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum. © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

FISHERS OF MEN

'Evangelical fishermen' was obviously not just simply a designation. To the extent that they were religiously biased, seventeenth-century catch metaphors had a fundamental precedent in the Gospels, namely in the renowned passages in which Jesus as a fisher of men calls Peter and his brother Andrew, as well as both sons of Zebedee, James and John, all fishermen by occupation, to follow him. Matthew (4:19) articulates it as follows: 'Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men".'

Luke (5:1-11) is more comprehensive. He also describes how, prior to the spontaneous joining up with Jesus, a miraculous catch had taken place in the lake of Gennesaret. After catching nothing for an entire night, urged on by Jesus the fishermen set out again to cast their nets: 'And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking.' Peter then fell to his knees before Jesus, and cried out that he was a sinful man: 'For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken'.

It should be clear that the substantial haul in this connection must be understood as the catching of people, or the making of proselytes, the not inconsiderable task Jesus assigned to his disciples. The fact that some of Jesus' followers had been active as professional fishermen is alluded to with fitting imagery in several passages in the Gospels. And this was to occur countless times throughout the centuries, hence again in the entreaty on the mid-seventeenth-century Fishery Board in Maassluis.⁴²

The man-fish comparison evidently appealed greatly to the faithful. It recurs time and again as early as the first centuries A.D. For instance, responding to the words of Jesus, the apologist Tertullian spoke of 'nos pisciculi' (we little fish), and believers were also sometimes actually represented as fish in early Christian art.⁴³ Highly characteristic of this kind of portrayal is a Roman tombstones on which two Christians are metamorphosed into fish swimming towards an anchor, the ancient symbol of hope.⁴⁴ **fig. 19** Other early Christian theologians also embroidered on Jesus' words, including Clemens of Alexandria who addresses his Lord personally in a hymn.⁴⁵

⁴² Sullivan 1987, p. 124, note 5.

⁴³ See Timmers 1947, p. 393, no. 850 ('nos pisciculi sumus secundum nostrum Iesum Christum'). For fish as a symbol specifically in Christian art, see Sauser 1974, and Ott 1974.

⁴⁴ Sauser 1974, pp. 36-37. See also De Waal n.d., pp. 136, 139; and Mulder 1961, ill. facing p. 32.

⁴⁵ Translated from Timmers 1947, p. 156, no. 300.

Fisher of men
 You save the fish,
 Who swim in the sea of sin
 From the treacherous waters
 Tempting them with happiness.

As touched upon above, a fish was also used as a symbol for Jesus himself (*ichthys*), albeit primarily in literature, and by extension it could also serve as a sign of the eucharist. Early Christian art made ample use of this symbolism, which even found its way into mosaics, oil lamps and other objects.⁴⁶ Incidentally, it is not always clear whether the fish refers directly to the person of Jesus, or alludes to the miraculous feeding of the five thousand.⁴⁷

The latter is certainly the case when a fish is illustrated together with a bread basket. **fig. 20** The miracle of the five loaves and the two fish, where thanks to Jesus' blessing thousands of people could be fed (12 baskets with bread were even left over), is mentioned in all four Gospels. It became a popular theme in the visual arts as of the third century, undoubtedly partly because it served as a prefiguration of the eucharist and sometimes as an image of *caritas*.⁴⁸ Curiously enough, the miraculous feeding was only depicted on a limited scale in the Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, among others by the Antwerp artist Ambrosius Francken in the central panel of a triptych whose wings have disappeared.⁴⁹ **fig. 21** We see Jesus in the foreground, surrounded by his apostles, blessing the five breads and the two fish, while the distribution to the multitude of the enormous amount of food is shown at the left of the composition.

⁴⁶ See Dölger 1943, *passim*.

⁴⁷ Timmers 1947, pp. 141-142, nos. 261 en 262.

⁴⁸ Schiller 1966, vol. I, pp. 173-176, and Nilgen 1974. For Old-Testament prototypes, see Timmers 1947, p. 235, no. 475. For representations of the theme in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century, see Pigler 1974, vol. I, p. 286.

⁴⁹ This altarpiece was painted on commission for the bakers' and millers' guild for the Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk in Antwerp; see Antwerp 1988, p. 142, no. 135.

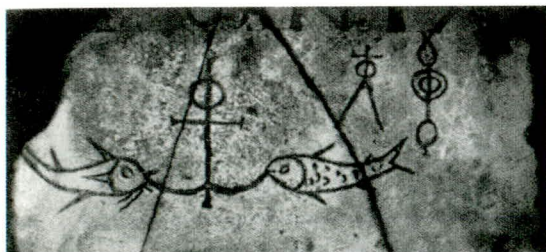


fig. 19 Fish and an anchor (tombstone).
 Catacomb of Domitilla, Rome



fig. 20 Fish with bread basket (wall painting).
 Catacomb of Callixtus, crypt of Lucina, Rome



fig. 21 Ambrosius Francken,
The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes.
Oil on panel, 280 x 212 cm. Antwerp,
Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten.
© IRPA-KIK Brussels

THE MIRACULOUS DRAFT OF FISHES

The theme of Jesus' miraculous draft of fishes, treated by many an artist elsewhere, was not depicted on a large scale in the Netherlands. Moreover, it was portrayed more by Flemish than Dutch painters, including Rubens.⁵⁰ **fig. 26** The same applies to the second miraculous draft, where Jesus appears to his disciples after his resurrection (John 21:1-8): this moment was rarely represented in the Republic, finding somewhat more resonance among painters in the south.⁵¹

Artists sometimes pictorially contaminated the calling of the apostles and the miraculous draft of fishes. At times only the calling was represented, usually that of Peter and Andrew, as in a drawing by Samuel van Hoogstraeten.⁵² **fig. 22** While at others, a related although less familiar scene was chosen, such as the appointment of Peter as the supreme pastor of the Church, which is described in the Gospel of John. Jacob Jordaens portrayed this event in

⁵⁰ Schiller 1966, p. 176; Pigler 1974, vol. I, p. 275.

⁵¹ Schiller 1966, p. 176; Pigler 1974, vol. I, p. 350.

⁵² See Sumowski 1981, vol. V, p. 2680, no. 1209. Another version: p. 2574, no. 1159. Van Hoogstraeten also drew a *Miraculous Draft of Fishes*: p. 2506, no. 1126. For other seventeenth-century Dutch depictions of the calling of Peter and Andrew, see Pigler 1974, vol. I, p. 274.

53 See Antwerp 1993, pp. 68-69.

a monumental canvas, choosing the moment when Peter and several other apostles had just returned from a catch.⁵³ **fig. 23** Bare-chested, Peter carries a large fish, while two of the other disciples are very unbiblically decked out with a kind of headgear worn by seventeenth-century fishermen in the Low Countries.



fig. 22 Samuel van Hoogstraeten,
The calling of Peter and Andrew. Drawing (reed pen, wash).
Paris, Musée du Louvre. © Photo RMN



fig. 23 Jacob Jordaens, *The appointment of Peter as
supreme pastor of the Church*. Oil on canvas, 208 x 235 cm.
Antwerp, Sint-Jacobskerk. © IRPA-KIK Brussels



fig. 24 Pieter van Aelst after Raphael,
The Miraculous Draft of Fishes. Tapestry, 490 x 441 cm.
Vatican, Vatican museums, © Alinari Archive, Florence



fig. 25 Cornelis Matsys after Raphael, *The Miraculous
Draft of Fishes* (engraving). Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum,
Rijksprentenkabinet. © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

The most famous interpretation of the miraculous draft of fishes undoubtedly stems from Raphael. It is part of a series of monumental cartoons of *The Acts of the Apostles*, designed between 1514 and 1516, on the basis of which tapestries destined for the Sixtine Chapel were woven on commission for Pope Leo X.⁵⁴ **fig. 24** This was done in the workshop of the Brussels tapestry weaver Pieter van Aelst. Raphael chose the moment after Jesus has performed his miracle. The tiny vessel in which he sits bulges with all manner of fish and with his hands clasped before him, Peter kneels down to confess his sin. The other disciples, in the second boat, are busy pulling in an overfull net from the water.

The arrival in Brussels of Raphael's impressive cartoons caused quite a sensation. Replicas of the tapestries would be made in various countries until into the eighteenth century.⁵⁵ The images also became known internationally via reproductions on paper: quite a number of paper imitations were produced, primarily of the *Miraculous Draft of Fishes*, from an engraving of the cartoon by Cornelis Matsys of around 1538 **fig. 25** up to experimental photography in the nineteenth century.⁵⁶

Passages in the central panel of Rubens' baroque triptych in the Church of Onze-Lieve-Vrouw over de Dijle in Malines are also indebted to Raphael's justly celebrated masterpiece. **fig. 26** Rubens painted this altarpiece, which originally had a predella, on commission for the Malines fishmongers guild in 1618-1619.⁵⁷ The iconography of the work in its entirety contains an unusually high fish and water content. The *Miraculous Draft* is flanked on the right wing by an episode from the fairytale-like story of Tobias (from the Book of Tobit, considered apocryphal by the Protestants): following the advice of his guide, the archangel Raphael, Tobias kills a fish in order to cure his blind father with its gall. In the left wing we see how upon Jesus' command Peter retrieves a silver coin from the mouth of a freshly caught fish in order to pay the tribute money in Capernaum (Matthew 17:27). When closed, the outer wings display depictions of Peter and Andrew, the first fishermen Jesus called to be fishers of men. The two panels of the predella

⁵⁴ White & Shearman 1958, pp. 193-221, 299-323; Fischel 1964, pp. 236, 250-272; D'Hulst 1960, pp. 129-138; and White 1972.

⁵⁵ White 1972, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁶ See Stuttgart 2001, pp. 482-483, nos. H 1.1-6, p. 493, no. H 11.2 and p. 495, no. H 12.2; Brussels 1985, p. 24 (no. 8); Veldman 1986, pp. 74-76; Lambert 1987, p. 112.

⁵⁷ Vlieghe 1977, pp. 103-104, and Lawrence 1984. Both publications discuss the relationship with Raphael's cartoons. Two predella panels are in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Nancy.



fig. 26 Peter Paul Rubens, triptych. Malines, Kerk van Onze-Lieve-Vrouw over de Dijle. In the centre: *The Miraculous Draft of Fishes*. Oil on panel, 301 x 235 cm; left wing: *Peter retrieving a silver coin from the mouth of a fish*. Oil on panel, 301 x 106 cm; right wing: *Tobias pulling the fish out of the water*. Oil on panel, 301 x 106 cm. © IRPA-KIK Brussels

(one of them has vanished), show Jesus walking on water saving Peter from drowning and the Old-Testament story of Jonah who was cast overboard and fell victim to a whale. Incidentally, the Book of Jonah speaks of a 'large fish'.

Rubens' monumental creation could be considered a catalogue of the most popular biblical fish themes in the seventeenth century. However, the work did require a specific reading. In the most favourable situation, the churchgoers were able to fathom the symbolism of the Miraculous Draft of Fishes and were aware of the traditional doctrine of the *Concordia Veteris et Novi Testamenti*. The latter was the – often very contrived – similarity between certain events or people, as proto- and antitypes in the Old and New Testament.⁵⁸ The faithful will have undoubtedly understood the story

⁵⁸ See Timmers 1947, pp. 21, 23. Lawrence 1984, pp. 34–35, finds a connection between the iconography of Rubens' altarpiece and the difficult situation the Southern Netherlandish fishing industry had long found itself in as a result of the political circumstances.

of Jonah, who spent three days and three nights inside ‘the great fish’, as a prefiguration of Christ, between whose redeeming death and resurrection also lay three days. This typology, by the way, is even spoken of by Jesus himself (Matthew 12:40): ‘For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’ Two episodes of the story, *Jonah thrown to the whale* and *Jonah cast up by the whale*, were spectacularly rendered in engravings by Jan Sadeler after designs by Dirck Barendsz a few decades before Rubens created his masterpiece and the latter artist may well have been aware of these prints.⁵⁹ **figs. 27 and 28**

Finally, with respect to Tobias, in Rubens’ altarpiece we may assume that honed by the old *Concordia* notion the thoughts of the faithful slid effortlessly from him to Jesus. Tobias, who with the gall of the fish restored his father’s sight, was understood as a prefiguration of Christ bringing the

⁵⁹ See Judson 1964, and Judson 1970, pp. 76, 118, 122-123.



fig. 27 Jan Sadeler after Dirck Barendsz., *Jonah thrown to the whale* (engraving). Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet. © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam



fig. 28 Jan Sadeler after Dirck Barendsz., *Jonah cast up by the whale* (engraving). Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen. Photo: Tom Haartsen

light to God's blind people. Augustine introduced his own metaphor to this discourse. In one of his sermons he likened Jesus to the fish that Tobias dragged alive onto the bank.⁶⁰ The latter is depicted in a representation by Pieter Lastman from 1613, **fig. 29** as well as in the background of a painting by Matthias Stom dating 20 years later.⁶¹ In the foreground of Stom's work preparations for grilling the fish are in progress, including the collection of its gall. **fig. 30**

⁶⁰ Timmers 1947, p. 301.

⁶¹ See Amsterdam 1991, pp. 90-91, and Blankert 1991, pp. 216-217, 225.



fig. 29 Pieter Lastman,
Tobias pulling the fish out of the water, 1613.
Panel transferred to canvas, 78 x 101.5 cm.
Leeuwarden, Stichting Museum het
Prinsessehof, Ottema-Kingma Collection.
Photo: Johan van der Veer



fig. 30 Matthias Stom, *Tobias and the fish*.
Oil on canvas, 111 x 125 cm. The Hague, Museum Bredius

EROTICISM AND SEXUALITY

If fish stimulated the human imagination, this was no less the case for half-fish. Exciting stories circulated about mermaids and mermen, who in the sixteenth and seventeenth century were sometimes even classified among the large family of aquatic animals.⁶² And, naturally, mermaids were also appealing because of their erotic talents. The connection between mermaids and eroticism may perhaps be easier to understand for people nowadays than that between fish and eroticism. Nevertheless, the latter should not be underestimated. Fish have been ascribed erotic connotations since time immemorial and served as a sign and symbol of procreation and fertility in many cultures.⁶³

In the seventeenth century fish still often enough swam in erotic waters, where many a fisherman could also be encountered. One finds a metaphoric spectrum ranging from pretensions of chaste love to all manner of obscenity in art and literature. Belonging to the first-mentioned category are the carved dolphins that are part of the imaginary (or real) fountains in a series of female portraits by Nicolaes Maes, some of which have a pendant of the husband. The dolphins are a metaphorical reference to the flowing water, and more than likely also to conjugal love. **fig. 31** They served as a symbol of love long before Maes' time.⁶⁴

⁶² Benwell & Waugh 1961, *passim*; Sliggers 1977, *passim*.

⁶³ Danckert 1978, pp. 1293-1315.

⁶⁴ Krempel 2000, pp. 79, 293 (cat. no. A54), 294 (cat. no. A61), 298 (cat. no. A84), 301 (cat. nos. A98 and A99a), 315 (cat. no. A164), 326 (cat. no. A221a) and 330 (cat. no. A235). As a sign of chastity, some of the women portrayed by Maes hold their hand in the water flowing out of the dolphin's mouth. See De Jongh 1986, pp. 190-191. The marriage between Poseidon and Amphitrite was said to have been contracted by a dolphin; see *Der kleine Pauly. Lexikon der Antike*, vol. I, Munich 1979, cols. 1448-1449. See also: De Tervarent 1958, vol. I, col. 143.



fig. 31 Nicolaes Maes,
Young lady near a fountain,
1666. Oil on canvas, 85 x 67 cm.
Stockholm, University.
© Stockholm University
Art Collections

fig. 32 Crispijn de Passe,
Angler and a woman (engraving).
 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum,
 Rijksprentenkabinet.
 © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam



fig. 33 Carel de Moor,
The angler. Canvas, 62 x 75 cm.
 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.
 © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

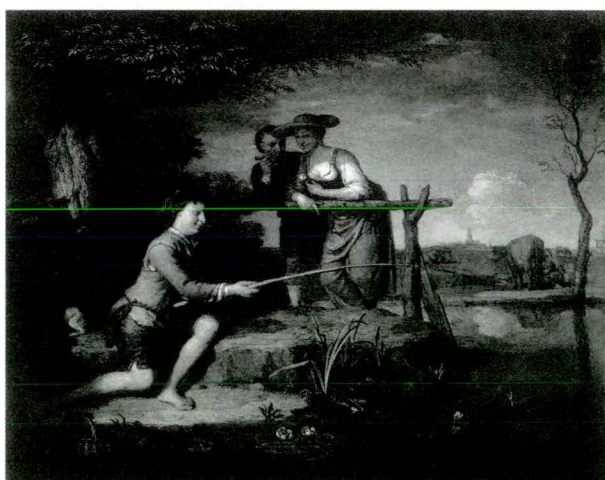


fig. 34 'Hiding there',
 emblem from Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft,
Emblemata amatoria, Amsterdam 1611.
 © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam



It is primarily in genre scenes that the relationship between man and woman is somehow connected to the catching of fish, as in an engraving by Crispijn de Passe from around 1600, and in a painting by Carel de Moor made more than a century later. **figs. 32 and 33** In both, the eroticism is manifest without overstepping the boundaries of middle-class propriety. De Moor's depiction presents an amorous couple gazing at a young angler, here fulfilling the same role as the cupid in an emblem by Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft.⁶⁵

fig. 34 There is a close connection between both media. The emblem, also featuring a couple, belongs to the *Emblemata amatoria* of 1611. This volume was reprinted a number of times and finally included in Hooft's *Mengelwerken* of 1704, just around the time De Moor painted his fishermen scene. The emblem's motto reads 'Daer schuylt' (Hiding there) and with its accompanying epigram Hooft embroidered upon the traditional metaphor of *esca et hamus*.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Amsterdam 1976, pp. 186-189. The angling Cupid already made his appearance in ancient art, for instance in a fresco in Pompeii; see Haug 1988-1990, col. 255.

⁶⁶ Hooft 1704, 612; Porteman 1983, pp. 134-135, 199-200. 'Met lecker' hoop de Min staet om te locken breedt;/ Maer 'tAes bedeckt den Hoeck: vast ismen eermen 't weet.'

Hoping for something sweet the Love-god is alluring openly
But the bait conceals the hook and you're caught before you know it.

The angler in the foreground of De Passe's image has just had a bite.⁶⁷ With a fish thrashing about on the line, he wraps his arm around his elegantly dressed companion, an action omitted in the Latin caption. Incidentally, this text makes no mention of love in an explicit sense. However, when the print was again issued as an illustration in a songbook, the *Nieuwen ieucht spiegel*, in 1617, the publisher included a sonnet next to it which does, in fact, exude an amorous atmosphere.⁶⁸ Two other notions are also addressed in this poem: that angling is actually an activity for a phlegmatic lazybones ('Fishing with a hook is idle'), and the combination of or contrast between fishing and birding.

⁶⁷ Hollstein 851, 11.

⁶⁸ *Nieuwen ieucht spiegel*, n.d. [1617], pp. 100-101; Veldman 2001, pp. 53-59, 139.

These animal verbs are encountered repeatedly in combination with each other. The meaning of the verb fishing in an erotic sense, moreover, appears to be variable. In some instances, it is clearly identical to birding in the sense of copulation, in other instances it refers to impotence, and in

⁶⁹ De Jongh 1999, pp. 31, 246-247, note 28.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

yet others possibly to masturbation, while additional vague subsidiary meanings also exist.⁶⁹ In a little poem in the 1624 *Steeckboeckxën* by Jan Jansz. Starter the verbs in question are clearly juxtaposed:⁷⁰

Fishing with the hook is what I like
As long as they bite, the perch and pike.
But whether I enjoy catching fish
When I can fulfil my birding wish,
My heart to this last is more inclined
If this in the world one can find.^{70a}

^{70a} *Ik Vis wel gaeren met een Hoek/
Als byten wil de Baers of Snoek/
Maer of ik nog zo gaeren Vis/
Wanneer der maer te Vog'len is/
Daer is myn Hert meer toe gezind/
Als 'tgeene men ter Wereld vind.*

⁷¹ See Snoep 1968-1969, pp. 128-130; and De Jongh 1999, p. 31.

Fishing as an image of impotence (although masturbation may also be alluded to), for example, is conveyed by Roeland Boddinck van Laer in a drawing for a songbook from the 1610s. **fig. 35** It is accompanied by a dispirited commentary on the part of the leading player, an old man seated in a rowing boat:⁷¹

I'm old and cold, and can only eat fish,
My wife, she's young, she'll do the birding.
Her cousin helps her out, I'm past it.
The going 's too much for me, I have to be off fishing.^{71a}

^{71a} *'k Ben out en kout, ick ken
me maer met vissche voen,/ Men
wif is jong, die sel het veughele
wel doen,/ Heur neef die helptter
wat, ick ken nz [niet] mier so
klaren,/ Het gaen valt my te
swaer, ic moet uyt visse varen.*



fig. 35 Roeland Boddinck van Laer, *The old fisherman*.

Drawing in a songbook. Rotterdam, Stichting Atlas Van Stolk

The cousin and the wife stroll along the river bank, she holds two birdcages, he a folded up fishing net. Another old fisherman representing the element of Water (*Aqua*) in an engraving by Claes Jansz. Clock, finds himself, as we gather from the accompanying quatrain, in an equally awkward predicament.⁷² **fig. 36** He is tortured by an overly demanding wife. While the verb ‘fishing’ applied here still seems innocent enough, the same cannot be said of the bird net in the final line:

⁷² Hollstein 14; De Jongh 1999, pp. 30–31.

Even if I have fished well, there is still often strife
With her, she who deliberately tortures me, my wife.
Even when tired and worn I come from the water so wet,
She still wants me to prepare the bird net.^{72a}

The state in which both elderly fishermen find themselves is made clear to us principally by means of the ambiguous texts. The depictions are somewhat less useful in arriving at the correct interpretation, although the bird cages and the net in the drawing by Roeland van Laer do afford a suggestive hint. The situation is different in a print by Pieter de Jode, **fig. 37** where the image itself is more explicit.⁷³ A woman seated before a blazing fire, legs spread wide apart with a net between them, rejects a man making advances behind her: ‘Dear,’ she says, ‘I have been fishing all night, I must dry my little net.’ The *double entendre* of the imagery should be apparent. The

^{72a} *Al heb ick wel gevist – valter dickwils noch twist / Teghen t' wijf, die mijn gaet met opset / quellen / Al coom ick moe en mat – uut het t' water seer nat / Soo wil sij noch dat ic t' voghel net sal stellen.*

⁷³ See Amsterdam 1997, pp. 85–89.



*Al heb ick wel gevist — valter dickwils noch twist
Teghen t' wijf, die mijn gaet met opset / quellen
Al coom ick moe en mat — uut het t' water seer nat
Soo wil sij noch dat ic t' voghel net sal stellen.*

fig. 36 Claes Jansz. Clock, *Aqua*, 1597 (engraving).
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet.
© Rijksmuseum Amsterdam



fig. 37 Pieter de Jode,
Woman drying her nets
(engraving, 2nd state).
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum,
Rijksprentenkabinet.
© Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

⁷⁴ See Van Thiel et al. 1976, p. 691 (inv. no. A 4467). A comparable passage is found on a silver medal by the seventeenth-century Utrecht silversmith Dirck Strycker; see Frederiks 1960, vol. III, p. 18 (no. 49), pl. 33.

fishing the woman speaks of refers to the intercourse she has enjoyed, and her wet net functions as a symbol of the vagina. There are several variants of this image – with a pendant of a birding scene provided with an equally eloquent caption – which says all that need be said about the familiarity of the visual idiom and the added texts.

Also belonging to this group is a painted wooden dinner plate made in the Southern Netherlands around 1580 bearing the following text:⁷⁴ fig. 38

Hey fisherman, I take no pleasure in your fishing, sit down,
For your angel rod is limp and your bait is good for nothing.^{74a}

^{74a} Waey.visser.in.u.vissche.en.
heb.ick.geen.vreucht,
sit.want.u.engelroey.is.slap.en.u.
aes.en.deucht.niet

In this case, the woman depicted rubs the fisherman's nose in his impotence in no uncertain terms. She figures that with his limp fishing rod he can just forget it. That fishermen were not heroes when it came to sexual intercourse was a truism deriving from traditional, astrologically determined anecdote. Their imputed inability rested on the complicated explanation, already discussed, in which a constellation, the element of water and the phlegmatic temperament were linked.⁷⁵ And it would seem that the chilliness and laziness often attributed to them, which ensued from phlegm, even extended to their libido.

⁷⁵ See note 14.



fig. 38 Southern Netherlandish School, *The impotent fisherman* (dinner plate). Oil on panel, 16 cm in diameter. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum. © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

OYSTERS AND MUSSELS

The preceding examples were mostly about the specific act of catching, with the fishing pole or the net, in which a tacit appeal is made to the viewer to perceive word and image at a metaphorical level. Only Maes' portraits treated the fish itself, particularly the sculpted dolphin, and it referred not to sexuality but rather conjugal love according to the official, edifying morality.

Indeed, fish appear to be sexualised far more often.⁷⁶ For some art historians, Joachim Beuckelaer, the painter of detailed market scenes, is one of the chief suspects in this area.⁷⁷ Just how correct this suspicion is in a general sense, I gladly leave unanswered, however the panel he produced in 1568 of a randy couple offering all manner of fish for sale can hardly have been viewed by contemporaries with innocent eyes. **fig. 39** One motif must have reinforced the other, and the contemporary viewer's understanding of the fish's meaning will have largely been determined by the message

⁷⁶ Danckert 1978.

⁷⁷ Kavalier 1986-1987; Wuyts 1986-1987.



fig. 39 Joachim Beuckelaer (?), *Fish sellers*, 1568.

Oil on panel, 101 x 138.5 cm. Dieppe, Château-Musée. © Photo RMN

conveyed by the woman with the telling pot in her lap together with the man and his eager hands.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ In Ghent 1986-1987, the authenticity of the panel is doubted in somewhat vague wording (p. 141, fig. 5). This publication, moreover, includes a number of variations of this scene, with fish or fowl. On the mug or jug as a uterine symbol, see De Jongh 1999, pp. 40-41.

⁷⁹ See *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, vol. XIII, Turin 1986, p. 163 ('Pesce' 12); *Symbolen. Historisch-culturele symbolen van A tot Z*, Utrecht 1998, p. 388.

⁸⁰ On the oyster, see De Jongh 1971, p. 169; De Girolami Cheney 1987.

Fish were to be granted a long life as phallic and fertility symbols, to which they were elevated already in the earliest days of human civilization. The Italian word for fish, *pesce*, was used regionally to indicate the male member, and in Turkish vernacular the penis is known as a 'one-eyed fish'.⁷⁹ On the other hand, oysters and mussels along with the shells of these molluscs were considered as female symbols, while oyster juice was even thought to be an aphrodisiac. Oysters or fish are often ascribed a titillating role in erotically tinged depictions, popular songs and scabrous epigrams of the Dutch seventeenth century.⁸⁰

If anyone spoke in clear terms about the oyster, it was Jan Steen in representations of a man suggestively offering a woman this delicacy as well as in his famous *Girl eating oysters*, which *au fond* is a seduction scene in which the salted oyster alludes to the sexual possibilities offered by the girl.⁸¹ figs. 40 and 41 No less blunt in this connection is a short verse about a statue of Venus in a 1668 songbook, ‘in which present day lovemaking is illustrated plain and simply’, published by the Amsterdam lawyer and poet of light verse, Johan van Dans:⁸²

81 H. Perry Chapman in Amsterdam 1996-1997, pp. 126-128.

82 Van Dans 1668, p. 99, and Amsterdam 1976, p. 204.

Have you not seen Venus
Stark naked and made of stone
Or was it painted on a panel
That her oyster ran wild
And that sweetest of pawns
Covered with her left hand [...]^{82a}

82a *Heb je Venus moeder-naect/
Niet gesien van steen gemaect/Of
waer op een Bordt geschildert/
Dat haer Oester was verwildert, /
En dat aldersoetste pandt/Had
bedeckt haer lincker-handt [...]*



fig. 40 Jan Steen, *Girl eating oysters*.
Oil on panel, 20.5 x 14.5 cm. The Hague, Koninklijk
Kabinet van Schilderijen Mauritshuis. © Stichting
Vrienden van het Mauritshuis, The Hague

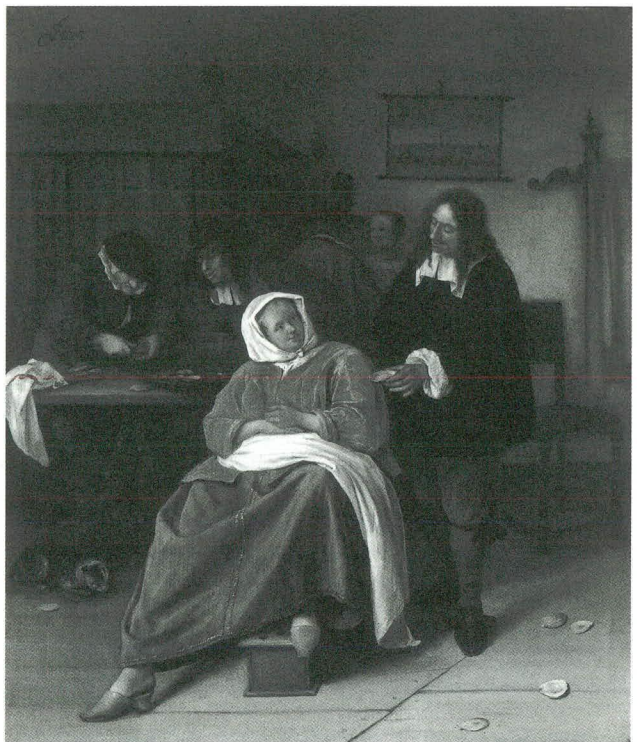


fig. 41 Jan Steen, *Man offering a woman an oyster*.
Oil on panel, 38.1 x 31.5 cm. London, The National Gallery.
© National Gallery, London

fig. 42 'Statue of Venus',
engraving from Johan van
Dans, *Scoperos satyra
ofte Thyrsis Minnewit*,
Amsterdam 1668.
Photo: University Library,
Amsterdam



⁸³ See De Cock 1911, pp. 10, 128 and 168; for 'St George's fish sauce' (Sint-Joris' vischsop), see *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche taal*, vol. VII, cols. 442-443, and vol. XXI, col. 1090.

⁸⁴ On the ruff, see Heestermans 1977, pp. 160-161; on the weever, see *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche taal*, vol. XII, col. 1592; and Luijten 1996, vol. II, p. 411.

⁸⁵ [Tysens] [c. 1715], p. 21: 'Vinger aan een Voorn gequetst// Een Juffrouw klaagde my, dat meest schier al de Vis,/ Wanneer m' er zich aan steekt, gelyk vergiftig is;/ Het zweerd, het zweld, het knooit; ja zeize, 't raakt je zinnen,/ Zy liet m' er vinger zien, die was gequets[t] aan vinnen./ Zy was juist buiten dat mooi rond aan alle kant;/ Ik vroeg uit Boeve jacht [door Amor], en wees zoo met mijn hand,/ Komt dat van Pieterman, van Post, van Baars, laat hooren./ Neen, zei de zoete sloof, ik kreeg een steek van vooren.'

In the accompanying engraving in which two dogs mate as a redundant bonus, Venus' left hand has become her right hand. **fig. 42**

Many sayings are affiliated with such witticisms, including 'The best part of fish and women is below the belly', 'She has eaten eel' (for a pregnant woman), or 'To be covered with St George's fish sauce', a curious expression characterising love and coitus.⁸³ Certain species of fish, such as eel, ruff and weever, appear to have been slightly preferred as an image of the male member.⁸⁴ The roach again afforded poets a certain advantage as a homonym, 'voorn' in Dutch meaning 'roach', and 'from the front'. The following stanza from *Apollo's Marsdrager*, an anthology published in the early eighteenth century in which all manner of seventeenth-century doggerel is reprinted, may be considered as typical of this genre:⁸⁵

Finger hurt touching a roach

A young lady complained to me, that when stung by
almost any kind of fish, one is immediately poisoned;
It [the wound] festers, it swells, it aches; yes, she said, it affects your senses.
She showed me her finger, which she had hurt touching fins.
Except for that she was everywhere deliciously rounded;
I asked her: spurred on by Cupid, and pointed so with my hand,
Was this caused by a weever, a ruff or a perch, speak up.
No, said the sweet wench, I was stung by a roach [i.e., from the front].

It cannot be denied that in this poetry we are again regaled with the same kind of humour often expressed in seventeenth-century genre scenes, many of which were made by Jan Steen. He, too, knew what to do with fish. In one of his numerous doctor's visits, in which a physician takes the pulse of a pregnant or lovesick girl, we see a commentator who closely resembles the artist himself holding two onions in one hand and – demonstratively – a herring in the other.⁸⁶ **fig. 43** In Brabant one said, 'She swallowed the herring, head and all' when talking about a pregnant girl.⁸⁷ However, the punch line of Steen's visual joke would hardly have been misunderstood by beholders from elsewhere.

⁸⁶ See Sutton 1982-1983, pp. 21-24; Westermann 1997, pp. 101-102. Steen included the joke with the herring and the two onions in another painting as well; see Sutton 1982-1983, p. 23.

⁸⁷ De Cock 1911, p. 168.



fig. 43 Jan Steen, *Doctor's visit*. Oil on panel, 46.3 x 36.8 cm.

Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection

fig. 44 Hieronymus Bosch,

The temptation of St Anthony.

Detail of the left wing. Lisbon, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga. Photo: Divisão de Documentação Fotográfica – Instituto Português de Museus



fig. 45 Follower of Hieronymus Bosch,

The battle between Shrove Tuesday and Lent.

Oil on panel, 59 x 118.5 cm.

Den Bosch, Noordbrabants Museum.

Photo: Ton van der Vorst



Now, Steen was hardly the inventor of this suggestive pictorial language. Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel introduced phallic fish much earlier to add lustre to certain scenes, the sexual calibre of which, moreover, is not always apparent. For instance, Bosch included several fish and fish-like creatures among the rabble beleaguering Saint Anthony. **fig. 44** He also invested aquatic animals with various connotations, including indecency, licentiousness, folly and possession by evil spirits. The artist furthermore conferred a specific identity on Shrovetide and Lent by means of fish. In *The battle between Shrove Tuesday and Lent* by an immediate follower of the master, a single fish refers to the scanty rations for the period to come.⁸⁸ **fig. 45**

⁸⁸ Gibson 1974, pp. 138-143; Bax 1979, pp. 42-43, 89-92, 132, 160-162, 217-219; Den Bosch 1992, pp. 109-110. And also Pleij 1992.

Scantiness, incidentally, is a concept not easily associated with Bosch, certainly when one thinks of one of his masterpieces, the unsurpassed pot-pourri of carnal pleasures known as the *Garden of earthly delights*. A number of fat fish are part of the carefully orchestrated arsenal of sensual and sinful attributes. Two enormous specimens are included in a circular procession of horsemen in the middle ground, one of which is held as a lance by a man



figs. 46 and 47 Hieronymus Bosch, *Garden of earthly delights*.

Details of central panel. Madrid, Museo del Prado.

© Museo Nacional del Prado - Madrid

mounted on the back of a feline predator. **fig. 46** Two more fish can be discerned in the crowd in the foreground along with a gigantic mussel shell concealing a nude amorous couple being carried by a man seemingly about to collapse under its weight. **fig. 47** With regard to their natural state, the warm-blooded creatures are no different from the cold-blooded ones and this equality must have partly determined the significance of the composition as a whole.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Bax 1956, pp. 44, 46, 48, 55 and 68, with at times rather far-fetched interpretations. See also: Gibson 1974, pp. 78-88; and Wirth 2000, pp. 48-49, 87-90.

In the work of Bosch and his followers, mussels too more than once play a sexual role, sometimes in an unequivocal allusion to the female genitals. In turn, Bruegel set a nude couple in an exceptionally large mussel in *Lust*, one of his *Seven deadly sins*, a striking detail that accords entirely with the tradition established by Bosch.⁹⁰ **fig. 48** Even one and a half centuries after Bosch, fish demons would fly around witchcraft scenes by David Teniers. **fig. 49** This readily evokes associations with what accused women recounted during witchcraft trials, namely that the penis of the devil, the legendary fornicator, was covered with fish scales.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Bax 1979, pp. 258-259; Klein 1963, pp. 205-207.

⁹¹ See Davidson 1988, p. 59; Danckert 1978, p. 1308; Bax 1979, p. 219.

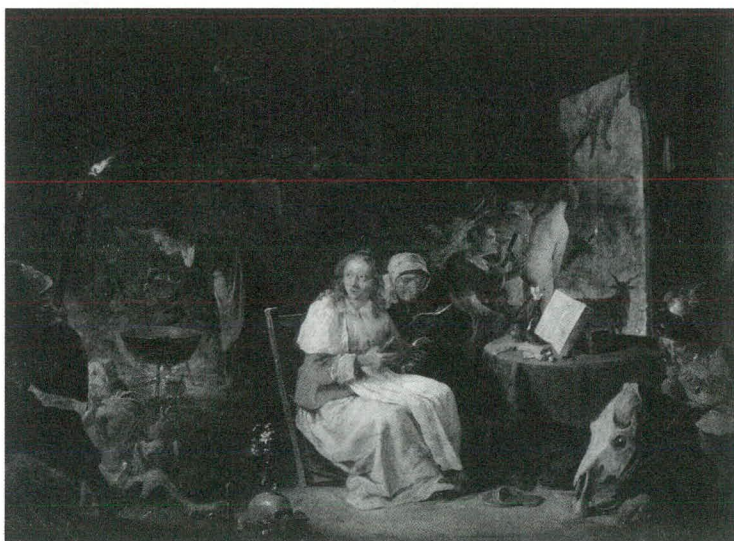


fig. 48 Pieter van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel, *Lust / Luxuria* (engraving). London, The British Museum. © The British Museum

HERRING

In terms of interpretation, the tenor of many biblical and erotic works as well as other images dealing with fish or the catching thereof is fairly easy to understand, certainly if one is somewhat familiar with the visual idiom of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and takes into account the fascination at the time with polysemy, obfuscation and symbolisation. However, matters were not always so simple and, moreover, one fish is not the other, also not in an iconological sense. Accordingly, we must be prepared for the fact that representations or motifs that more or less agree in appearance can differ significantly in meaning. This is the case for instance with a group of paintings by artists of differing persuasions in which a character holds a herring in a demonstrative fashion. Further elucidation of this theme simultaneously allows us a glimpse of the many pitfalls besetting art historical hermeneutics in general.

As we have ascertained, the herring in the *Doctor's visit* by Jan Steen mentioned above has an unmistakable phallic connotation [fig.43](#) How does this work in other paintings? Is a scabrous meaning also embedded in the herring held up in a painting by Gerard van Honthorst? (cat. no. 39). The man clasping the fish in his left hand is a lecherous type from whom something



[fig. 49](#) David Teniers, *Witches' scene*.

Copper, 36.8 x 50.8 cm. New York, The New York Historical Society Collection

like this could be expected. Upon closer inspection, however, caution is called for here. The fact that the man holds a pitcher of beer in the other hand sheds a different light on the image. The thirst caused by the salty fish was commonly quenched with beer, and the alliance of herring and alcohol, moreover, was elevated into a motif in painting – one depicted primarily by Utrecht painters. This culinary combination is found in paintings by Hendrick ter Brugghen (cat. no. 37) and Hendrick Bloemaert, albeit in neither instance is the fish so prominently displayed as in the work by Honthorst.⁹² Whether he, indeed, intended only to depict the theme of eating and drinking, or wished to add a phallic accent in a single go is a moot point.

What should we think then of the gutted herring in a painting by Christiaan van Couwenbergh, which is also ostentatiously held up by a man with a popular, roguish demeanor (cat. no. 38)?⁹³ Although this rendering has been understood as a depiction of Taste, one cannot entirely reject the idea of a sexual charge. Missing here, however, is an ambiance that would make speculation unnecessary by affording a definitive, concrete answer as to the representation's purport. Steen, in fact, did just this: virtually all of the elements in his doctor's visit scene are somehow related and reinforce each

⁹² On the meaning of the herring in a more general sense, see Weber 1987; on Ter Brugghen, see Helmus 1999, vol. A, pp. 162–164, vol. B, pp. 759–760; on Hendrick Bloemaert, see Roethlisberger & Bok 1993, vol. I, pp. 467–468 (cat. no. H55).

⁹³ Raupp 1984, pp. 321–322. On another occasion I linked Van Couwenbergh's painting – on Raupp's authority then still considered a self-portrait – with the expression 'to give someone a smoked herring', which amounts to giving someone a dressing down or a scolding (see Van Thiel 1961). On further consideration I now doubt this interpretation, also because what is depicted is not a smoked herring (De Jongh 1993–1994, p. 29). On Van Couwenbergh, see also Maier-Preusker 1991, p. 218 (no. A53).



fig. 50 Anonymous, *Woman from Enkhuizen*.

Oil on panel, 49 x 29 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum. © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

other's meaning. With respect to Van Couwenbergh, our attempt at an additional explanation simply dead-ends.

Initially, a woman selling herring in a little panel by Godfried Schalcken confronts the viewer with the same problem, namely the lack of an informative context (cat. no. 59).⁹⁴ This notwithstanding, an erotic reading does seem safe in this case. The girl's coquettish pose and her seductive glance, evidently aimed at an imaginary client at the left of the painting, combined with the herring she holds up, does not appear to be open to a dual explanation. To which I would also like to forward as an argument that Schalcken broached erotic matters on other occasions as well, with depictions leaving nothing to desire in terms of clarity.⁹⁵

Finally, an entirely different atmosphere is encountered in an anonymous, rather primitive painting from the end of the sixteenth century portraying a farmer woman from Enkhuizen with a herring barrel.⁹⁶ **fig. 50** Just like the figures in the works of Honthorst, Steen, Couwenbergh and Schalcken, the woman holds up a herring, but now solely as a reference to the business bringing her to the market – the 'golden trade' so passionately praised by Vondel. The connotation in this case is entirely unambiguous. Here, fish is nothing more than fish, an innocent foodstuff as it is presented in the culinary poem Jan Six van Chandelier penned inviting his friends for supper.

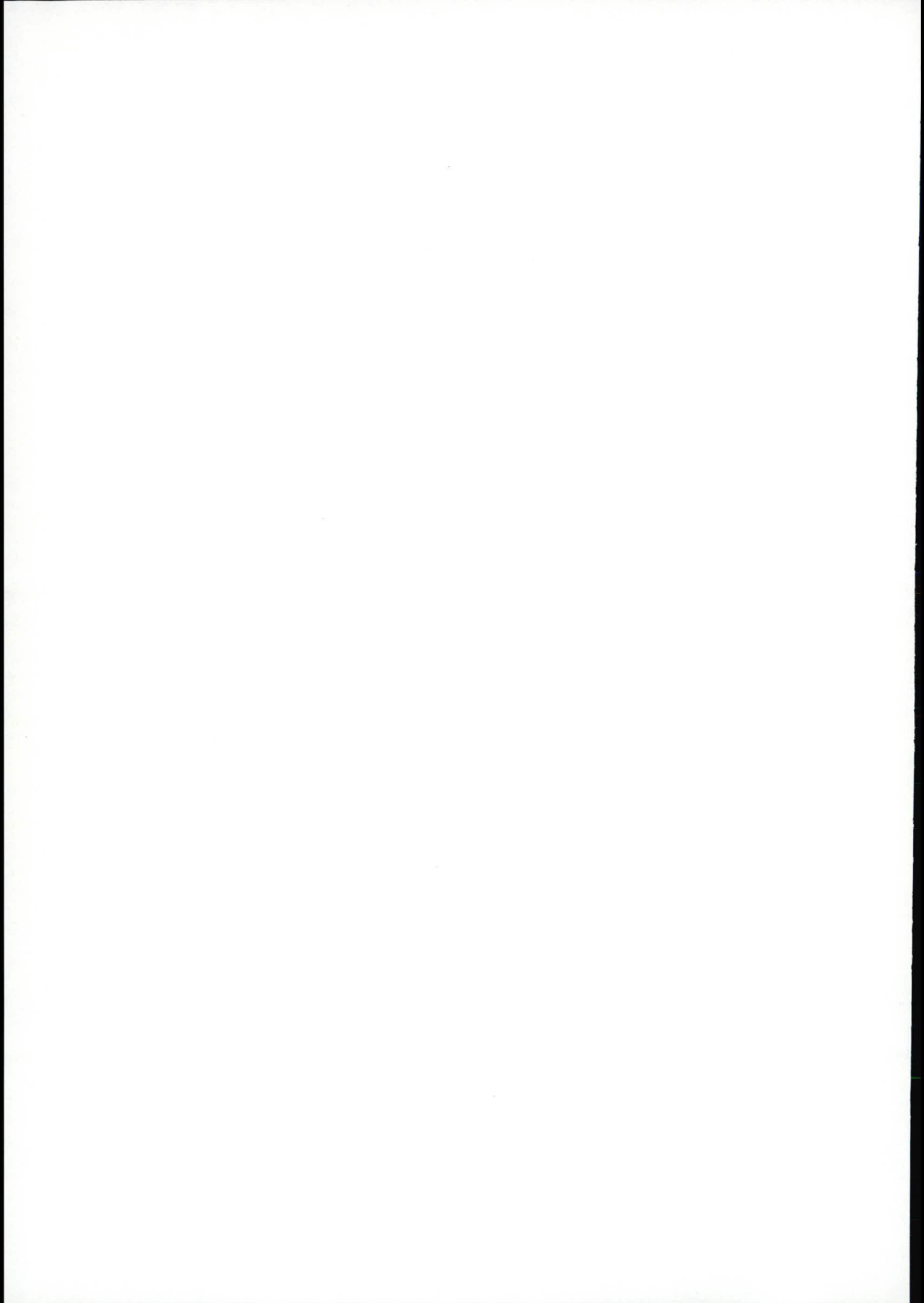
⁹⁴ Beherman 1988, pp. 240-241.

⁹⁵ Beherman 1988, for example cat. nos. 42, 44, 143, 144, 170 and G1; Amsterdam 1997, pp. 362-364.

⁹⁶ Rijksmuseum, inv. no. C 1503. The painting is part of a series of illustrations of Dutch traditional costume. For more details, see Van Thiel et al. 1976, pp. 736-740.

TO BEHOLD AND SAVOUR

Against the weighty background of religious and sexualised fishing, including its interpretation, it is useful to realise that aquatic animals in the sixteenth and seventeenth century were probably primarily depicted with a view to the market, not so much the fish market but the art market, where the conditioned associations will have taken their own course. The latter in no way precludes fish also having been portrayed purely for their glistening and attractive appearance, in order to please the eye of the beholder and, by way of synergy, whet one's appetite. This suggestion is convincingly thrust upon us by many a fish still life. 



FISHERY AND THE FISH TRADE

THE SALMON OF BERGSE VELD

Piet Martens



fig. 1a Allis shad. From: Walter 1913

For most people in the Netherlands, fishing is associated primarily with sea fishing. This is certainly true for the period after the Second World War: after all, what Dutch person is not familiar with the 'Hollandse Nieuwe' (young herring), the accompanying race to bring in the new herring, fishing harbours such as Scheveningen, Vlaardingen and IJmuiden, and virtually nothing other than sea fish is on the menu. However, the Netherlands once boasted two other flourishing forms of fishery: the Zuider Zee (an inner sea, now the IJsselmeer) fishery and the freshwater fishery in the inland waters. To this day professional fishing is still conducted in the IJsselmeer and in the rivers, although no longer on the same scale as in the past. The Zuider Zee fishery, the most important products of which were eel, Zuider Zee herring, flounder and anchovy, became obsolete in the 1930s when the inner sea was permanently enclosed by the IJsselmeer Dam (Afsluitdijk). Large-scale freshwater fishing – salmon in particular – ceased to exist at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, because salmon simply stayed away for various reasons at that time. Fishermen working on the Rhine and the tidal rivers with large anchored stow nets, catching mostly eel, vanished from the stage shortly after the Second World War. A few fishermen nonetheless persevered in the Hollands Diep and the Haringvliet (south of Rotterdam) until the end of the 1960s, when construction of the Haringvliet Dam as part of the Delta Works (hydraulic works reinforcing the Dutch coast) made fishing with stow nets – which depended on the tidal streams – impossible.

This essay focuses on the fishery of salmon and other migratory fish in the Verdrongen Waard (Drowned Land) of South Holland, also known as Bergse Veld after the town of Geertruidenberg, which geographically covers present-day Biesbosch. This fishery experienced its apex in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and the Verdrongen Waard was the Netherlands' pre-eminent salmon reservoir for several centuries, with Geertruidenberg as its administrative and trading centre.¹ The subjects covered are: the fish themselves; the fishing process; the history of this fishery; tenancy and the way in which the fishery was organised; the fish trade; and in closing some statistical information is given to clarify the socio-economic perspective.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, the information contained in this article is based on Martens 1992, *passim*. For freshwater fishery see Van Drimmelen 1987 and Martens 1999. The history of the Zuider Zee fishery is well documented in Dorleijn 1982-1996.

THE FISH

The Verdrongen Waard counted the usual freshwater fish such as carp, bream, roach, pike, perch and the like, as well as fish from brackish water – the well-known smelt – and flounder. The importance of fishing these kinds of fish, however, paled in comparison with the abundance of salmon, allis shad and sturgeon, the Waard's most important products. **fig. 1a-c** The latter three are anadromous migratory fish, meaning they are really sea fish that swim upriver to spawn. Eel is a catadromous migratory fish that lives in freshwater but, conversely, migrates to the sea to spawn. The catches of the salmon, shad and sturgeon fisheries were so vital that mentions of other types of fish are hardly ever found in the archives.²

² Municipal Archive Geertruidenberg and Archieven van de Nassaue Domeinraad (National Archive, The Hague); see also Martens 1992.

The most important of the three was salmon (*Salmo salar*). Salmon begin their lives in small, oxygen saturated streams in the headwaters of the Rhine. They undergo a transformation between one and three years of age and subsequently migrate to the sea. Some return to the river after only one year at sea, and measure approximately 60 to 65 cm long. This often occurs in the summer and therefore the fishermen also called them 'jacobjes' (little Jameses, after St James Day, 25 July) or at Bergse Veld also 'truytkens' (small trout). Most salmon, however, remain longer in the sea, and are approximately 100 to 150 cm long when caught. The fishermen spoke of large winter salmon when they were caught before 1 May and of summer salmon when caught after this date. The migration of salmon is not seasonal and our finned friends thus ensured the fishermen with an income throughout the year.

The situation differed for shad (*Alosa Alosa*), which migrate in the spring. This migration begins in March ('come the first thunder in March, grab the shad by its tail' is an old Dutch saying), reaches its peak in April and May and ends in June. Shad is a species of herring, but grows much larger, reaching a maximum of 70 centimetres. Most are approximately 50 to 60 cm long. Being a delicious fish it was therefore a popular product.

The same applied to sturgeon (*Acipenser Sturio*), which while caught in far lesser numbers than salmon or shad, certainly made a spectacular impression in terms of size and weight. Sturgeon can reach a maximum

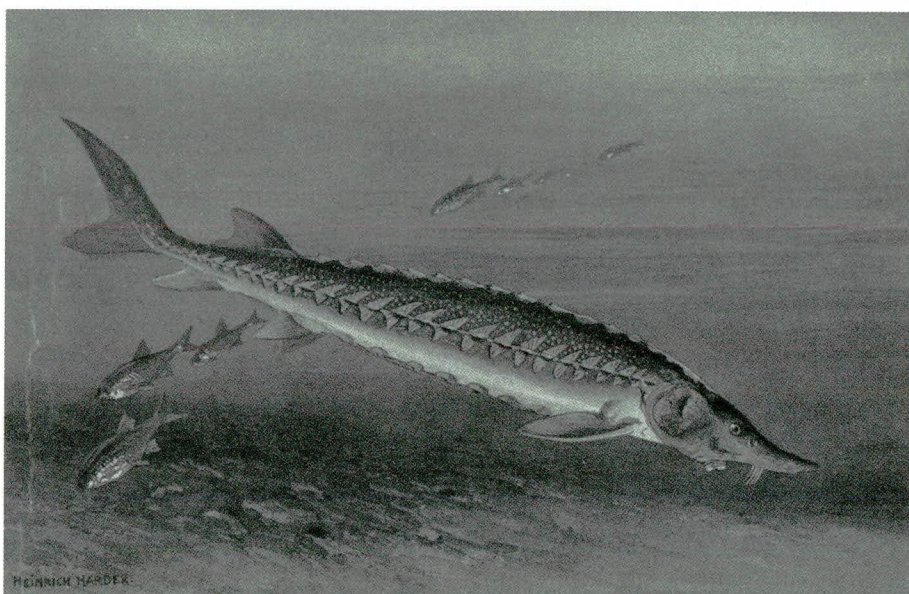


fig .1b and 1c Salmon and sturgeon. From: Walter 1913

³ The last sturgeon caught in the Netherlands, in 1952, was 2.60 metres long and weighed more than 100 kilos. Van Drimmelen 1987, p. 84.

length of six metres. Generally, however, they were not that large in this country and most will have been between one and two metres long, though approximately three metre-long specimens also occurred regularly.³ Sturgeon usually spawn in the spring and so catches declined after August, although now and then a few might be found in the nets as late as October. A soldier billeted in the village of Drimmelen in 1833 in connection with the Belgian Revolution recounted how a 274-pound sturgeon (it will most certainly have been three metres long) knocked over a 14-year-old boy with its tail.

The same soldier also had some definite ideas regarding the taste of salmon, shad and sturgeon. While having never much liked fish, he writes, he was developing an appreciation for salmon. He thought nothing of shad, it tasted bad whether fried, boiled or stewed. But, he was quite enthusiastic about sturgeon, of which his landlady made a delicious mince that, according to him, looked and tasted exactly like fried calf's mince.⁴

⁴ Rehm 1985, p. 24.

CATCHING METHODS

The fish in the Verdrongen Waard were caught in fykes placed on 'steken', a type of fencing consisting of long rows of poles interconnected with wicker-work resulting in a coarse-mesh net. Extensions called 'bouten', or side fences set squarely along the main fence, to which the fykes were secured, were located at regular intervals on either side of the fence. Because the fykes were set on both sides of the fence, fishing took place during low and high tide. **figs. 2 and 3** Even though these fences occurred throughout the entire river area, their placement was strictly regulated because they could attract much of the debris drifting along with the current and impede ongoing shipping. In the Verdrongen Waard, however, fishing was the principal activity and the fences had primacy. Looking at maps one can clearly see just how large the fences were. **figs. 5 and 6** Even the smallest one, called Dronckenoort, was no less than 150 metres long and thus larger than a regular river fence. Measuring a total of almost five kilometres, the Steek van Hoekenisse (located more to the east) was the longest. To accommodate shipping traffic an opening had been made in the middle, the 'sailing hole', so that the skippers did not have to navigate all the way around it.

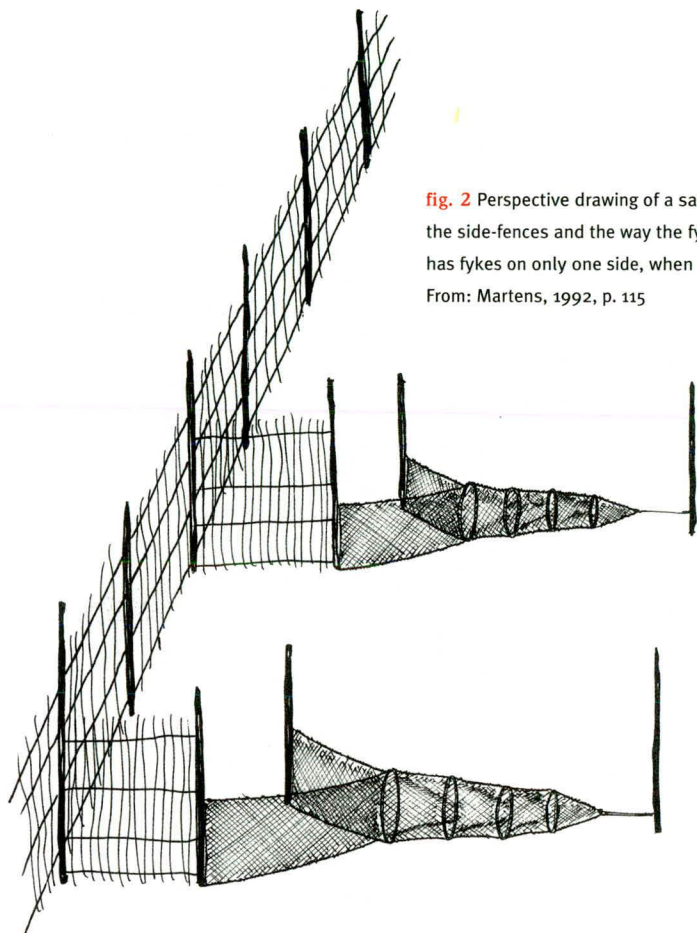


fig. 2 Perspective drawing of a salmon fence. It shows the willow wickerwork, the side-fences and the way the fykes are fastened. In the drawing the fence has fykes on only one side, when in reality they were attached on both sides. From: Martens, 1992, p. 115



fig. 3 Anonymous, *Geertruidenberg seen from a salmon fence*. Engraving, end of the eighteenth century. Geertruidenberg, Municipal Archive
The fence shown here has an uncommon construction of nets instead of wickerwork.

Salmon, which head for freshwater to spawn, swim upstream, which is why the fences were placed counter to the current. Salmon tend to migrate during low tide, when the water recedes. When the tide rises they sense the decreasing flow and become slightly disoriented, swimming somewhat aimlessly about. The Bergse Veld afforded plenty of space for this situation and this is how they frequently ended up in the fykes, which the fishermen raised at low tide. If the men left from Geertruidenberg they thus sailed with the tide. On their return they usually sailed again with the tide because the slack water lasted for only about an hour and they generally needed that time before going home on the rising tide.

Major maintenance of the fences took place in the early spring. Under the watchful eye of the 'supervisor of the auction' (*controleur van de afslag*, a general supervisor, not only of the auction), sworn surveyors (*gezworen meters*) checked whether the fences were still in their proper place and whether any repairs were required. This was usually the case due to winter storms and the damage caused by floating ice. During the fishing season the fences were inspected monthly. Everything had to be ready by March when the shad came in. Weather conditions made it impossible to work on the large fences from the end of November until the end of February. After the relatively quiet winter period, the usually massive migration of shad occasioned a great deal of work and the season got off to a very busy start right from the beginning.

After raising the fykes, the fishermen brought their catch to the auction of Geertruidenberg, where it was purchased by fish merchants (*vischcoopers*). The fishermen's boats were provided with fish wells giving access to the open water so that the fish could be brought in alive: live fish is fresh fish!

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

With its abundant waterways, the Netherlands formerly had an extensive fishery of freshwater fish. Pike, carp and eel were regularly on the bill of fare, along with such 'ordinary' fish as roach and bream. Fishing was done anywhere there was water, although not always by professional fishermen.

Quite often fishing provided supplementary income, for instance for innkeepers who caught part of what they served their customers. Fishing in city canals was often the privilege of the local civic guard. What applies today, applied then too: fishing without a permit was prohibited and the rent paid constituted a rather significant source of income for the local authorities.

Large-scale fishing in more substantial bodies of water, such as in the tidal rivers, was the domain of professional fishermen. This certainly applied to fishing in the Verdrongen Waard, where the coveted salmon was fished along with the sizeable sturgeon, and in the spring also large numbers of the popular shad. Salmon and sturgeon were not only highly sought after, they were very expensive, clearly fish for the elite. Accordingly, the catches were large: it was a lucrative type of fishing, both for the tenants and the local authorities.

Prior to 1421, the area where the Biesbosch now lies was a large polder, the Grote Waard of South Holland. Although fertile, the land was very low and the inhabitants thus had to contend regularly with flooding. When in November 1421 the combination of spring tides and a severe storm resulted in the legendary Saint Elisabeth Flood, the entire Waard and part of the surrounding countryside were inundated. [fig. 4](#) The damage was tremendous and ultimately proved irreparable: the water never disappeared. For about a hundred years plans were hatched – but never realised – to dike in the area again. The deluge caused extensive breaches and quite probably the region was already being cautiously fished by the following spring. Fishery activities simply increased the longer the water remained. Probably in connection with the plans to salvage the lost land, a committee to investigate fishing rights in the Verdrongen Waard (or Drowned Land as the area was generally called by then), was finally established in 1516. The fishermen paid no rent in all that time, but this changed as of around 1525, when it became mandatory.

Various periods may be distinguished on the basis of the prevailing tenancy systems and the changing landscape (or rather, fishing grounds). The rentless period lasted from the Saint Elisabeth Flood until about 1525. The tenancy system then introduced was fairly susceptible to fraud and incited numerous conflicts among the fishermen. Consequently, another tenancy system was

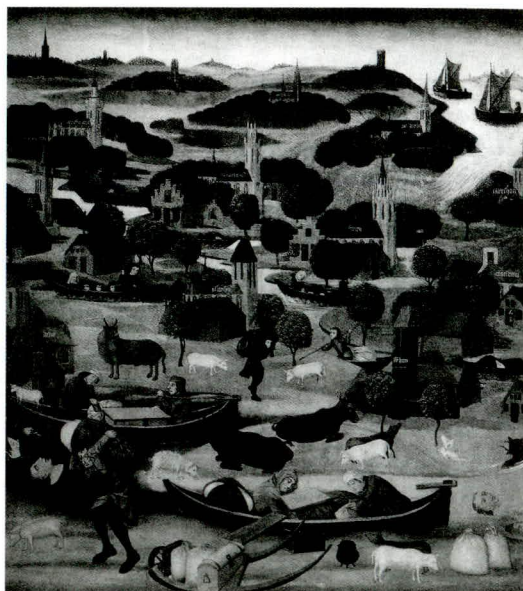


fig. 4 Master of the Elisabeth panels, *The Saint Elisabeth Flood*, 18-19 November 1421.

Panel, 127 x 110 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum. © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

initiated fairly soon thereafter, in 1560, followed by a period of relative peace and prosperity that lasted well into the eighteenth century. As of the middle of the eighteenth century, however, the authorities began to worry about the declining salmon stock, and the silting-up of the Verdrongen Waard accelerated. Toward the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century the 'channels and coves' that would later become the Biesbosch began to take shape at low tide in this tidal delta. While some salmon continued to be caught in these inlets, the scale on which this took place was no longer comparable to that in the seventeenth century. The digging of the Nieuwe Merwede River in the second half of the nineteenth century dealt the *coup de grâce*: the salmon chose this new route for their trek upstream, bypassing the Biesbosch en masse.

TENANCY AND ORGANISATION

Before the Saint Elisabeth Flood transformed the Grote Waard into a kind of inland sea, the Meuse River flowed right through the polder area. At the

time, the river formed the boundary between the jurisdiction of the County of Holland and that of the Count of Nassau, who was also Lord of Geertruidenberg and had the loan of the area south of the Meuse.

Once inundated, the region was fished without the fishermen paying rent. A tenancy system was introduced around 1525 when it had become clear that the dikes would no longer be repaired. This tenancy system (*vroon-systeem*) operated on a commission basis. Meanwhile, the Verdrongen Waard was filled with salmon fences and as is always the case with fishing waters, there were grounds where more and grounds where less fish were caught. Fishermen now had to pay rent per length of the fence that they leased, the 'rod money' (*roeygelt*, derived from the Rhenish measuring rod, approximately 3.75 metres); in addition they paid a kind of commission (*vroon*) that was dependent on the quality of the section and of the catch. This commission varied from the second penny (50%) of the catch being levied for a good fishing section to the eighth penny (still 12.5%) for a poor fishing section. Should he have so desired, the estate steward could deviate from this, and quite frequently he made individual agreements with the tenants. Poor fishermen with large families were often allowed to pay less rod money and commissions. The situation sounds more amicable than it actually was, because conflicting interests remained and to his great annoyance the estate steward noticed that a substantial amount of fish was caught in poor sections to which little rod money and low commissions applied. The following incident illustrates how this could happen. One day in the 1550s, Hendrik Meeusz de Hoogh caught a large salmon in his section for which he had to pay the third penny. His neighbours leased a section to which the eighth penny applied, and they agreed to sell the salmon under the name of the cheaper fishing section and split the difference. The neighbours' young son was going to go to the auction and claim ownership of the fish. The boy's mother, however, had some reservations that the child would be able to pull this off: 'he is so thick he wouldn't know what to do'. She was right, and the auctioneer was not fooled for a second: the boy was caught and the ruse thwarted. This kind of deception nevertheless succeeded often enough. There were also tenants who fished various sections (or had them fished). Thus it was

smart to have both a good and a poor section and to auction the catches as from the poor section. This made a substantial difference in the commission.

There were other problems as well. Already during the rentless period, fishermen – understandably – set up their fences where they thought they would have the best chance of catching fish. They continued to do so after the commission system was introduced, but some fishermen further extended their sections after they had been approved and their value established. As a result they quarrelled regularly with their neighbours, who frequently also paid a higher commission. Moreover, the southern fishermen who leased from the Count of Nassau tended to place or extend their fences so that they more or less cut off the fences of the northern fishermen, who paid rent to the Count of Holland, so that they no longer caught anything. Accordingly, the northerners often pulled down these extensions. Not surprisingly, the southerners did not take kindly to this as they believed themselves to be in the right. Consequently, the border region – the former course of the Meuse – was regularly the stage of violent clashes between fishermen.

These difficulties and the ever-growing commission fraud prompted a drastic revision of the tenancy system. Because many of the conflicts were directly linked to the border between the two tenancy territories, a decision was made to first unambiguously chart them. Furthermore, the tenancy system on the southern side also called for revision. This was not taken lightly. A committee worked on the preparations for the revision operation as of 1556, and it was implemented as of August 1560. On 14 August an imposing delegation sailed from Geertruidenberg up the Verdrongen Waard to officially launch the activities. Among them was William of Orange (the Silent) himself, who as Lord of Geertruidenberg had a crucial interest in the matter. Two surveyors in attendance mapped out the area on behalf of the Prince of Orange and the County of Holland. The former course of the Meuse was determined and permanently marked with perches with ball-shaped topmarks so that the demarcation of the jurisdictions was once and forever laid down both on site and on a map. The map surveyor Pieter Sluyter made for the County of Holland is a unique document. While one of the very first people

in the Netherlands to use modern triangulation, Sluyter still painted it in the old way. **fig. 5**

The location of the old fences is indicated on the map, but this would soon change. Previously, the fishermen had simply placed the fences where they pleased and had their own spots, which they sometimes leased for 6, 10 or 12 years. Problems arose in combination with the commission system because in the course of such long periods the steward easily lost sight of which fences were good and which grounds attracted less fish. Consequently, the 'vroon' system was abolished after 1560. The fences were assigned permanent places established by the steward and were inspected annually by the surveyors to check the correctness of their (fixed) location. **fig. 6** Long-term tenancies were also terminated: henceforth there were annual public leasings and everyone was free to bid on the sections, which were leased by 100 rod lengths (c. 375 metres). This afforded the steward certainty that the best areas also fetched the highest rent. The system strikes

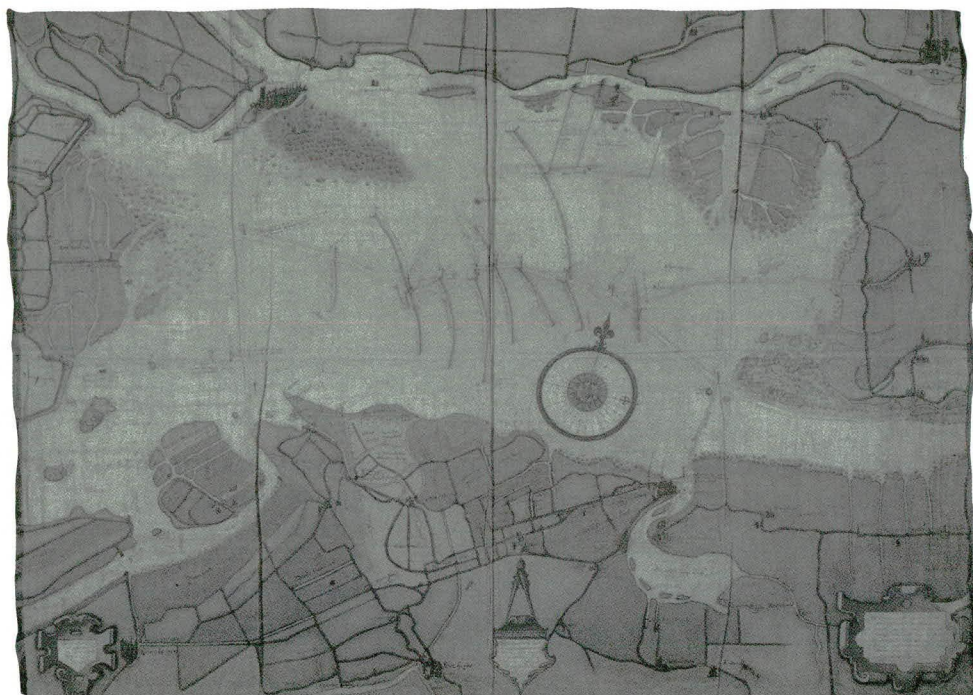


fig. 5 Map by Pieter Sluyter, land surveyor of the County of Holland, c. 1560

The Hague, National Archive, Hingman map collection

The map represents the Verdronken Waard of South Holland, with the salmon fences, at high tide in August of 1560.



fig. 6 Map of the Verdrongen Waard of South Holland, situation around 1620.
The Hague, National Archive, Hingman map collection
The map indicates the permanent places of the salmon fences as determined shortly after 1560. At the end of the eighteenth century the ongoing silting up put an end to this situation.

one as modern and, indeed, it was. While Geertruidenberg did have an active fishermen's guild, it did not have a single privilege when it came to tenancy – non-members of the guild could also lease and fish. Yet the guild was not only a social or professional association. It ensured some social security, albeit on a rudimentary level, by arbitrating quarrels between fishermen, supporting widows and old fishermen (usually via the municipal poor relief, mediated by the guild), and establishing a funeral fund for the guild brothers.

The new system worked well: the sections retained their permanent places until fishing with these large fences came to an end in the French Period, although many sections were consolidated as of the mid-eighteenth century as a consequence of the area silting up over time. Commission fraud had been eradicated in this new system. In the public leasing, the good sections fetched more and the commission was more or less automatically incorporated into the lease sums. Nevertheless, illegal trade outside of the

auction never disappeared entirely. This was because Geertruidenberg had a long-standing right to impose turnover tax on fish that was traded within its city walls. This privilege dated from before the Saint Elisabeth Flood and was maintained until France annexed the Netherlands in 1810. This levy (*ingeld*) amounted to the 20th penny (5%). As a means of safeguarding the town's revenues, all of the fish caught in the Bergse Veld had to be auctioned in Geertruidenberg. Hence there was less to be earned on the black market than previously, but every little bit counted. And so merchants from Antwerp in small, swift vessels (*ventjagers*) with fish wells to keep the fish alive kept coming. While the 'vroom' had been in effect they were regularly found at the Bergse Veld during the fishing season buying salmon directly from the fishermen and thus evading the commission, a highly lucrative transaction for both parties. The waters were supervised by a guard ship (*uitlegger*) which, however, could not be everywhere at the same time, and the hawkers' ships were quick. The guard ship also remained active after the lease revisions, something that proved quite necessary. The hawkers paid well; fresh salmon was always worth a pretty penny and the fishermen were often poor.

THE TRADE

Not all trade took place on the black market. After the fykes were raised, most of the fish simply ended up at auction where it was sold by the auctioneer, as is common to this day. Private individuals could also purchase fish for their own use at these sales, but it usually went in batches to fish sellers (*vischcoopers*), the merchants who supplied the surrounding towns and markets.

However, before this could take place, it was imperative to preserve the merchandise. Fish spoils rapidly anyway and certainly in the summer months at a time when there was no refrigeration swift action was required. Perhaps one of the reasons freshwater fish used to be so popular was that it could easily be supplied alive and thus was very fresh indeed. This was done in ships with fish wells, or in separate corfs or creels shaped like a boat.

figs. 7 and 8 Bargemen on regular services simply hauled along a supply of

fish in this manner. The fish was also delivered alive at market in wooden buckets or flat boxes. Probably due to a celebration, in 1609 the steward in Geertruidenberg had bought '17 carp, 24 pike, 14 perch, 4 ide, 4 eels, 10 bream and a salmon' on behalf of the 'house of his royal Grace'. The fish was transported with an 'express boat (...) alive in a creel' to The Hague. Keeping the fish alive was not always such a humane affair, and after all this could not be done for very long in this manner. Sometimes this proved impossible given the time that transportation took and fish was therefore smoked, salted and pickled. Smoking was popular, especially in the case of salmon because being a rather fatty fish it is easier to smoke than salt. Moreover, smoked fish is tastier and keeps well. Regardless of the technique used, smoked fish can be preserved for a couple of weeks up to a few months. Salted fish, too, keeps for long and therefore salting was an equally important though costly method of preservation because salt was very expensive at the time. For this reason, fish was also often pickled in vinegar, a process that sometimes went haywire. In 1661 an Antwerp dealer corresponded with his Geertruidenberg associate about the freshness of barrels of sturgeon. He had some complaints. 'Greetings, mate,' he writes before listing his grievance concerning the seriously poor quality of the fish. He noted that every single barrel smelled and he had been compelled to 'fill every one with fresh vinegar and add slices of pickled lemon'. This was necessary, for the shipment had to travel on to Brussels.

Geertruidenberg had a long-standing relationship with South Brabant and Flemish towns. Much of the fish went to Antwerp, Malines, Louvain, Ghent, Brussels, and so forth. Sometimes the trading was done at a municipal level: for instance, in the early sixteenth century a representative of Louvain visited Geertruidenberg every spring to make arrangements for the delivery of fish during Lent.

The fish was usually transported to these places overland, with horse and carts. A well-known Geertruidenberg fish dealer from the first half of the seventeenth century, Hendrick Cornelisz van Flitterwijck, was originally a waggoner. He could not write and so signed his name when necessary with his mark, a stylised whip. Presumably he could read. His wife, Geertrui

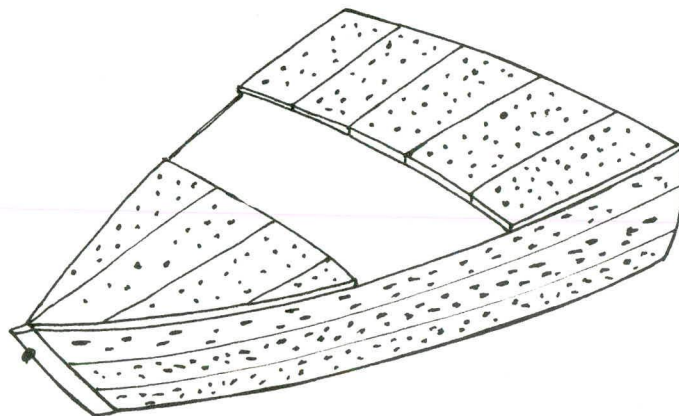


fig. 7 An example of a boat-shaped corf or creel used to transport live fish.
From: Martens 1992, p. 140



fig. 8 Hendrik Avercamp, *Fishermen in moonlight*, 1625-1630. Pen and brown and black ink, brush in watercolour, 144 x 195 mm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet. © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam
The depicted boats are very similar to those used in the Verdrongen Waard. The wicker corfs in the left foreground kept the fish alive. Fences such as those at the right were found on a larger scale in the Verdrongen Waard.

Claesz, had mastered both skills. She had to! When Hendrick was away for weeks on end during his trips to South Brabant and Flanders, Geertrui had to run the business. She bought and sold salmon and other fish on a large scale. She kept the books, that is to say she recorded every transaction she made, sometimes all jumbled up, in a large thick notebook. When the delivered fish had been paid for, she crossed off the entry in question. She also conducted the correspondence with trading partners and settled the bills with the collector (*inmeester*) of the auction. This accounting was crucial, for as was usual in the seventeenth century everything was done on credit. First the fish had to be delivered, and only then was payment made, sometimes on fixed days (St Bavo's Mass, celebrated on 1 October, was such a well-known date). The very independent role played by merchant wives was common in the seventeenth century, and caused no shortage of astonishment on the part of foreigners.⁵

⁵ Van Deursen 1991, pp. 19-22;
Belliën, Van Deursen and
Van Setten 1995, p. 248;
Schama 1988, p. 422.

SOME STATISTICS

Naturally, many other industries were related to fish, fishing, and trade. There were coopers, smokehouses, shipyards, equipment suppliers, supervisors, special fish haulers, fish counters, fish basket makers, and so forth. Geertruidenberg had always been a garrison town and so fairly busy on a regular basis: even so, civilian life was largely dominated by fish and its trade. In the seventeenth century approximately 150 fishermen were active at the Bergse Veld, and they ensured a fair amount of related work. Annually the fishermen caught approximately 16,000 salmon, and in the spring brought more than 60,000 shad to town. The number of sturgeon was considerably lower: annually 200 to 800 which, taking the duration of the season into account, was still between 10 and 20 of these enormous creatures per week. The levy the fishermen paid at auction was good for about 20% of the town's total income, and in the second half of the seventeenth century even for 35 to 50%. In that same century the average leasing revenues amounted to slightly under 20,000 Carolus guilders, or approximately 40% of the total turnover of local, legally supplied fish. 

**FISH RECIPES
IN LATE-MEDIEVAL
AND EARLY-MODERN COOKBOOKS**

Johanna Maria van Winter



In the past, people consumed substantial amounts of fish – if they could afford to, that is, for fish was expensive. Particularly during the periods when flesh meat (that of quadrupeds and fowl) was forbidden by the Roman Catholic Church, the faithful resorted to fish. The most important of these periods was the 'Quadragesima', the 40 weekdays from Ash Wednesday to Easter. Until the advent of the Protestant Reformation, not only was meat prohibited during these more than six weeks but eggs and dairy products as well. Accordingly, in the countries north of the Alps, where normally lard or butter was used as shortening, cooking underwent a complete transformation at these times. Furthermore, the consumption of meat was also prohibited throughout the year every Wednesday and Friday, or Friday and Saturday, depending on the diocese, and fish therefore became a favourite substitute on these days too. Eggs and dairy products on the other hand were permitted on these days and thus butter could be used in preparing the fish. In the true fasting periods fish could be fried in oil, but not basted with butter. These strict fasting prescriptions also applied to the three weeks of Ember days, or fasting periods, which coincided with the changing of the seasons: the Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays of the week after Pentecost (the beginning of summer), of the week of the Exaltation of the Cross in September (the beginning of autumn) and of the week of Saint Lucy in December (the beginning of winter). According to the Rule of Saint Benedict, monks were really never allowed to eat meat, except when ill. Moreover, they observed longer fasting periods without eggs and dairy products than laymen.

CHANGING OF THE SEASONS

In the medieval way of thinking nourishment was closely related to health and the church's fasting prescriptions may well have been informed by medical considerations, although this was never specifically stated. One wonders whether the fact that the fasting weeks corresponded with the changing of the seasons was simply a coincidence given that they could serve as a period of rest for the body to restore and ready it for the next season. According to a theory in part derived from the Greek physician Hippocrates around 400 B.C. and refined by Galen of Pergamon in the second century A.D., the human body was governed by four *humores* or elemental fluids and their qualities: blood – hot and moist – resulted in a sanguine temperament; yellow bile – hot and dry – induced a choleric temperament; black bile – cold and dry – engendered a melancholic temperament; and phlegm – cold and wet – was characteristic of a phlegmatic temperament. The different seasons also had individual dominating features which most people more or less shared: spring was warm and moist, like childhood; summer warm and dry, like youth; autumn cold and dry, like middle age; and winter cold and damp, like old age. While every individual, indeed, had his own primary temperament, he was influenced by the seasons in the course of the year, and by the ages of man throughout his life. Food had to counterbalance these influences, so that balance and health could be maintained or restored.

Within this theory (chiefly the work of Galen of Pergamon), foodstuffs were ascribed individual properties. For instance, fish was cold and moist and therefore considered unhealthy, except for individuals with a highly choleric temperament. However, the addition of vinegar, wine or verjuice (the juice of unripe grapes or apples) and spices with their warm and dry qualities would compensate for fish's clammy coldness. The unhealthy aspects of fish were also diminished through cooking or frying. These Greek theories reached Western Europe around 1100 via centres of Islamic leaning in North Africa and Spain, after the Greek writings had been first translated into Syrian, from that language into Arabic and subsequently into Latin. These trans-

lations were elaborated upon in a series of medical documents at the famous school of Salerno in Southern Italy, which became authoritative in the field of medicine throughout Western Europe in the following centuries.

LETTERED COOKS

These beliefs also penetrated into the kitchens of the upper classes, where lettered cooks sometimes incorporated them in their recipe collections. A good example of this is Meister Eberhard, the cook of Duke Henry of Bavaria-Landshut (1404-1450). Writing in German, he commented on the medical effect of various recipes and even devoted an entire chapter to fish.¹ According to him, the best fish thrived in water flowing over a rocky bottom, and were neither too large nor too small and not too oily. This kind of fish was good were it fresh. Still, all fish was cold and moist and bad for the digestion. Fish was the cause of thirst and poor blood and of too much phlegm in the stomach, and was ill-advised for people who were sick due to the cold. But for people who were hot and dry, fish was very useful. Furthermore, he warned against salted fish and noted that fresh fish was especially good in brawn or aspic with a little bit of vinegar. All fish was healthier when fried rather than boiled, but unhealthy moistness was expelled when the fish was boiled in wine or vinegar and spices.

¹ Feyl 1963, pp. 102-103.

Not all cooks were as learned as Meister Eberhard, but in cloisters and other ecclesiastical households, as well as in the well-to-do circles of princes, the aristocracy and the middle classes, increasingly more cooks could be found (always men and not a single woman before the sixteenth century) who wrote down just what they prepared. As of the end of the thirteenth century steadily more cookbooks were written in the Germanic and Romance languages and sometimes in Latin. They include numerous recipes for preparing both saltwater and freshwater fish, as well as fresh and dried fish (especially stockfish). As it is not possible to discuss them all here, the following focuses primarily on recipes for sea fish and freshwater fish from the northern

waters. And even then, a full account is beyond the scope of this essay. The emphasis thus lies on herring, dried and fresh cod, eel and pike. Molluscs such as oysters and mussels are left out of consideration, as well as sea mammals such as the porpoise, even though they were eaten during fasting periods and medieval and early-modern recipes for them exist.

HERRING IN THE BRINY DEEP

Caught in the North Sea primarily along the Danish coast and traded salted in barrels via Lübeck and other Hanseatic cities since the twelfth century, herring was surely the sea fish of choice. Later Flemish and Dutch fishermen also caught herring further out at sea, which they gutted while still on board the ship, and preserved in barrels with salt. Virtually no recipes for herring have been found in medieval cookbooks, but from sixteenth-century texts it appears to have been consumed both boiled and fried. A recipe from 1560

² Cockx-Indestege 1971, p. 146 (VI 29).

calls for 'soaked herring visibly fried' (geweeckte haring toonbaar gebraden).² It was first air dried by making an incision diagonally below its navel, from which its fluids could drain, after which it was cooked on a gridiron.

Presumably what is here being referred to is a salted herring that had first been soaked in water in order to freshen it. The same cookbook contains a recipe for preparing all manner of salted fish, including herring: it was to be placed in cold unsalted water and brought to a boil. Cod, haddock, flatfish or herring could then be left in their own cooking water, 'because its nature is best served there' (want si nemen daer haer meeste natuere).³ What this means exactly is open to discussion, but it strikes me as a reference to the theory of the *humores* (humours), in which fish is cold and moist and thus by nature suited to the briny deep.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 141 (VI 5).

The above recipe is from the oldest printed Dutch cookbook, the *Notabel boecxken van cokeryen*, of about 1514, [fig. 1](#) and is preceded by a recipe for cooking fresh carp or pike.⁴ These fish types were not to be placed immediately in cold water, but only put in the pan when the salted cooking water was boiling. After being well cooked, these freshwater fish, too, were allowed

⁴ Jansen-Sieben & Van der Molen-Willebrands 1994, p. 24, nos. 16 and 15 resp.

Oec.

35 m.

Des Eerst Keantaf. = 1.

Een notabel boeckhē vā cokerpē het welc bewijst
alle spijse te bereidē elc na sinē scaet het si in brup
lochten in feestē banchetten oft ander maeltiden be
sondere en het es eenen ieghelijcken van grooten noo
de te hebben die sijn dinghey ter eeren doen wilc



fig. 1 Thomas Vander Noot (printer), *Een notabel boeckken van cokeryen*,
Brussels, c. 1514. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek

to remain in their stock. According to the recipe, the cooking liquid for pike always consists entirely or partly of wine mixed with a bit of vinegar, 'because its nature is best served in it' (want hi sijn natuere daerinne neemt). In the theory of the humours, the cold and moist properties of fish were somewhat modified, if not improved, by wine and vinegar. The cooking of pike is discussed further below.

A common way of preparing fish was to boil it in a pan with salted water, although braising it on a gridiron also featured regularly. While normal for fowl and large chunks of meat, roasting on the spit was less prevalent for fish. Cooking it in the oven was a rarity, although the *Notabel boecxken* does include a recipe for cooking carp in the oven.⁵ This had to be done in an earthenware pot in a broth consisting of 1/3 part wine to 2/3 parts water with vinegar, a little salt, raisins, ginger and cinnamon.

Common fish sauces in the French kitchen were 'sauce cameline' and a green sauce, which are also found in the cookbook of 1560.⁶ For the green sauce, parsley, sorrel, ginger and cinnamon are ground and mixed with bread crumb soaked in wine and vinegar. 'Sauce cameline', which derives its name from the colour of camel hair, is a mixture of spices, especially cinnamon, with toasted bread crumb soaked in red wine or vinegar and pressed through a sieve. This cookbook also includes a cumin sauce for the times of fasting, a 'caminei', made of bread crumb, almond milk, cumin, saffron and sugar, which can be poured over river fish or fish fried in oil.⁷ An entirely different, bright red sauce from 1560 is meant to accompany fried shad (a large herring-like fish), and made of toasted white bread soaked in red wine, with powdered sugar, ginger, cinnamon and litmus.⁸

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 57, no. 134.

⁶ Cockx-Indestege 1971, pp. 152-154 (VIII 2, 8, 9).

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 154 (VIII 11) for bream; also in *Notabel boecxken*, Jansen-Sieben & Van der Molen-Willebrands 1994, p. 21 no. 8, for perch.

⁸ Cockx-Indestege 1971, p. 174 (VIII 90).

STOCKFISH FOR SOUTHERN GERMANS

Along with herring, cod was the most commonly sold sea fish. The Norwegian city of Bergen was the export centre of stockfish, dried unsalted cod. Once again it was the Hanseatic merchants who procured the fish – packed in bales – there, selling it on to consumers all over Europe and

in England. Accordingly, recipes for stockfish exist in various languages, and especially in German. Apparently stockfish was considered typical fare for Southern Germans, at least that is how it is characterised in the Latin *Registrum coquine* of John of Bockenheim, a cook originally from Germany working at the papal court of Martin V in Rome (1417-1431). His recipe reads: 'Prepare stockfish as follows. Soak it in water overnight so that it becomes soft. Cook it a little, pour off the water and clean it well; then fully boil it, with onions and parsley; and add the saffron with other fine spices. And this would be fit for Thuringians, Hessians and Swabians.'⁹

⁹ Laurioux 1988, pp. 741-742, no. 69.

John of Bockenheim devised a category of eaters for each of his recipes, in part according to their native country, such as the Italians, Rhinelanders, Saxons and Frisians, and in part according to their social rank, such as kings, noblemen, clergymen, captains and mercenaries, nuns, and even whores and pimps. No other medieval cookbook includes this kind of information and perhaps he did not mean it all that seriously.

The oldest known German cooking manuscript, *Daz Buoch von guoter spise*, compiled in the first half of the fourteenth century in or near the cathedral city of Würzburg, includes a stockfish recipe that apparently enjoyed a certain popularity and recurs in almost the same wording in two fifteenth-century cookbooks from Bavaria and Austria.¹⁰ The Würzburg recipe is as follows: 'A stockfish dish. Take a stockfish that is not dry and remove its skin, soak it overnight in cold water, press it in vinegar such that it remains whole, bind it lengthwise on two slats and place it on a wooden grill. Heat it and sprinkle it with butter; make a batter of flour and eggs and add to this ground pepper or ginger and saffron and a little salt. When the fish is good and hot, pour the batter over it making sure the fire is hot and cook it until it turns a reddish-brown. Before removing it from the fire, drizzle it generously with butter and then serve it.'¹¹

¹⁰ Aichholzer 1999, pp. 108-111, no. 18 and pp. 264-265, no. 23.

¹¹ Weiss Adamson 2000, p. 64.

Meister Eberhard's cookbook, which includes a multitude of comments on matters of health, contains a different stockfish recipe: the fish is first boiled until partly cooked and then drained, reserving the stock; it is then fried in lard. Subsequently ginger and saffron are mixed in the stock which is then

¹² Feyl 1963, p. 90, no. 23.

poured over the fish in the pan and brought to the boil three more times.¹²

As regards soaking the stockfish, these recipes only call for water. In Sabina Welserin's 1553 handwritten German cookbook one finds the recommendation that the stockfish be soaked for a day and a night in lime-water, after which the water is poured off, and the fish soaked again in limewater for 24 hours. The fish must then be thoroughly rinsed in fresh water to remove the taste of lye. Next it is cooked gently so as not to overcook it, and then cooked fully for a solid hour. Before serving, salt is sprinkled and melted butter poured over it, and mustard is spread on it in three different places.¹³

¹³ Stopp 1980, pp. 56-59, no. 33.

In the 1560 Dutch cookbook, the stockfish is soaked in rain water with lime, there called 'calclooge' (lime lye). In the summer this must be done for a day or a night, in the winter for a day *and* a night. After having been thoroughly rinsed it is poached in water, which is then poured off and the fish drained. It is served with melted butter. In the following recipe in the same cookbook, only the tail end of the fish is used, which is first pounded with a wooden mallet and soaked in rain water, scales and all. It is then roasted over low heat and basted with butter, and sprinkled with powdered ginger when ready to serve.¹⁴

¹⁴ Cockx-Indestege 1971, p. 143 (VI 11 and 12).

Naturally, cod can be eaten fresh as well. A Dutch recipe for garlic sauce as an accompaniment to fresh cod is found in the *Notabel boecxken*. It consists of bread crumb combined with crushed garlic and the liver of the cod rubbed through a sieve with the cooking liquid of the fish and some salt.¹⁵ A recipe for stewing fresh cod is included in the cookbook *De Verstandige Kock of Sorghvuldige Huys-houdster* (The Sensible Cook or Careful Housekeeper) of 1670 in the section 'Van alderley Visch' (All kinds of fish). Cuts of cod are placed in a pewter dish, not quite covered with water and sprinkled with ground pepper, whole mace, some salt, crumbled rusk and a copious amount of butter, and this is allowed to simmer with the lid on over burning coals for about an hour to 90 minutes. When done, lemon juice is sprinkled on it.¹⁶

¹⁵ Jansen-Sieben & Van der Molen-Willebrands 1994, p. 39, no. 67.

¹⁶ *De Verstandige Kock* 1670 (unpaginated, unnumbered).

FISH CALENDAR

Thus far we have primarily discussed saltwater fish but, naturally, a great deal of freshwater fish was also consumed. The 1560 Dutch cookbook begins its chapter on fish with a disquisition of which kinds of fish are best eaten in which months of the year.¹⁷ All of the fish mentioned are freshwater fish, understandably so since this fish calendar was translated from a Southern-German incunabulum, a modest treatise on the catching of birds and fish printed at the end of the fifteenth century. Bream and mackerel are at their best in February and March, goby from February to May, crayfish in March and April, salmon in April and May, lamprey in May, eel from May to mid-August, tench in June, pike in July, roach is good both in the summer and the winter, white bream in the autumn, and perch is always fine except in April and May. Thus, choice freshwater fish is available in every season.

¹⁷ Cockx-Indestege 1971, pp. 140-141.

In the Dutch coastal regions, well-to-do consumers ate both freshwater and saltwater fish, even during the same meal, as appears from the 1571 meal regulation of the Knights of St John in Haarlem. Their commandery was not populated by knights but by Roman Catholic clergymen, who with a view to the recent riots related to the Eighty Years' War wished to eat according to the prescriptions of the church. In addition to menus for festive meals with distinguished guests, they also determined which dishes were eaten in the 40-day period before Easter, in particular the kinds of fish.¹⁸ During those weeks their Sunday mid-day meal consisted of green vegetables with three fish dishes: herring and kipper for the first course; cod, perch, pike, salmon, roach, dab or flounder for the second course; and fried fish with deep-fried dumplings for the third course. At supper they were served beer and bread, with herring and kipper for the first course; salad, cod, pike or salmon for the second course; and fried fish with deep-fried dumplings for the third course. On the weekdays during the 40-day fast there was only one meal a day. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays this consisted of boiled or fried herring and fried eel for the first course; cod, bream or pike for the second course; plaice, roach or ruff for the third course; and fried

¹⁸ Allan 1877, pp. 320-321.

fish, deep-fried dumplings, pretzels, figs, raisins and nuts for the fourth course. On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays on the other hand one had to settle for cooked eel and kipper first, pike and bream second and plaice or ruff third. Remarkably enough on the latter days (or perhaps on all fasting days?) the servants were served only two courses consisting of cooked or fried herring for the first, and plaice, roach or stockfish for the second course. The gentlemen never ate stockfish, but rather fresh cod along with herring, pike and eel.

SPANISH OR FRENCH PIKE

The following recipe for cooking pike is given in the cookbook of 1560: boil it in salted water with the lid on, adding rosemary, thyme, sage or bay leaf, and when it is partially cooked add a spoon of mustard and a spoon of fresh yeast. Then let it cook fully and serve it with this broth only.¹⁹

¹⁹ Cockx-Indestege 1971, p. 141 (VI 3).

The comment in the *Notabel boecxken* that pike should always be wholly or partially cooked in wine because of its 'nature', is thus not heeded here. However, this is the case in the very next recipe, which states that in order to shrink a large pike it should first be cooked in boiling water with a lump of wood ash wrapped in a bit of cloth, after which the stock is poured off and the fish subsequently cooked in wine or bitter beer with vinegar and a little salt until done.²⁰

²⁰ *Ibidem* (VI 4).

Pike is stewed differently according to a handwritten sixteenth-century cookbook from Ghent. A couple of onions are sliced and boiled in water, the pike – cut in pieces – and salt is then added, followed by three large ladles of clear pea stock; this broth has to be strained after which fresh butter, peppercorns, mace and ground ginger and a little verjuice are added followed by the pike, which is stewed in this mixture.²¹ The seventeenth-century *Verstandige Kock* recommends pouring vinegar on a pike and then placing it in boiling water with salt and allowing it to cook vigorously until it turns blue, or to achieve the same effect boil it in a mixture of half Rhine wine and half water. Furthermore, this cookbook includes recipes for sauces to

²¹ Jansen-Sieben & Van Winter 1998, pp. 148-149, no. 250.

accompany boiled pike: in the Spanish manner lemon juice is simmered with Rhine wine, water, butter, ginger, saffron and clove and the boiled pike then placed in this mixture,²² and in the French manner cubes of bacon are sautéed in butter until they turn reddish brown and are then boiled in a pot with the fish broth, Rhine wine, vinegar, mace, pepper and ginger, until it thickens. While these sauces with bacon and butter were clearly not suitable for the Roman Catholic fasting periods, these interdictions no longer needed to be heeded in the Protestant Netherlands. It is nevertheless striking that these recipes seem to come from Catholic countries such as Spain and France.

²² *De Verstandige Kock* 1670; also in Jansen-Sieben & Van Winter 1998, p. 143, no. 237.

EEL WITH PEAS

Various recipes for pike were also suitable for eel or a combination of the two. Accordingly, the *Notabel Boecxken* describes how to grill pike and eel, then cut them into pieces and subsequently stew them in a pot with pea stock, in which the finely ground liver of the pike is also boiled and to which ginger powder, saffron and salt are added.²³ We already came across pea stock for a stew of pike in the Ghent cookbook, and the *Notabel Boecxken* includes a recipe for cooking eel in pea stock and then making a sauce by straining this cooking fluid together with parsley, egg yolks, ginger powder and other spices and verjuice.²⁴ Or one can remove the skin of the eel, cut it into pieces and fry it in a pan with sautéed onion and parsley. An accompanying sauce is then made consisting of bread crumbs soaked in pea stock, combined with ginger powder, cinnamon and saffron and a little verjuice.²⁵ It is also possible to boil an eel in clean water, remove its fins and return it to the cooking liquid, from which the fat has been skimmed and to which parsley and sage, gooseberries and ginger powder are added with a generous knob of butter. This stock must be greatly reduced with the eel in it. Ginger and cinnamon are sprinkled on it when served.²⁶ The eel fat from the cooking liquid can be used for a sauce, mixed with breadcrumb, garlic, parsley and salt that have been pressed through a sieve with vinegar. It is served with the cooked eel.²⁷

²³ Jansen-Sieben & Van der Molen-Willebrands 1994, pp. 32-33, no. 42.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 28, no. 30.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 34-35, no. 49.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 43-44, no. 81.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 39, no. 68.

I found no recipes for smoked eel, although there were some for jellied eel, as well as for eel and pike in galantine, a kind of brawn. The bones of meat and the bones and skin of fish have a strong gelatinising effect during the cooking process, which was put to good use in the medieval and early-modern kitchen. The 1560 cookbook includes a recipe for a jelly of pike, lamprey, carp and eel. The fish is chopped in pieces and cooked in wine with salt and then removed from the cooking liquid to cool off. The liquid is strained and mixed with galingale, crushed cloves, saffron, nutmeg, ginger, cardamom and mace. The washed and finely sliced scales of the fish or the skin of the eel are also added. This sauce is thoroughly cooked again and poured over the by then cooled fish, which is placed in a dish with its scales facing down. The fish and sauce must then be left in a cool place to stiffen up as a gelatine.²⁸

²⁸ Cockx-Indestege 1971, pp. 163-164 (VIII 39).

Gelatine stiffens due to the binding quality of the scales, bones and skin (or in the case of meat just the bones) cooked with it. The scales, bones and skin were removed before the mixture was fully gelatinised. A galantine is made with the aid of an added binder such as bread crumb and/or isinglass, that is the dried bladder of sturgeon, the predecessor of our gelatine. Both the cookbook of 1560 and the *Notabel boecxken* provide a recipe for a galantine of pike and eel.²⁹ The bones and skin were removed before cooking (in the case of eel) or were decomposed by the acid of the wine and vinegar during the cooking process (in the case of pike).

²⁹ Resp. Cockx-Indestege 1971, p. 157 (VIII 22), and Jansen-Sieben & Van der Molen-Willebrands 1994, p. 42, no. 77.

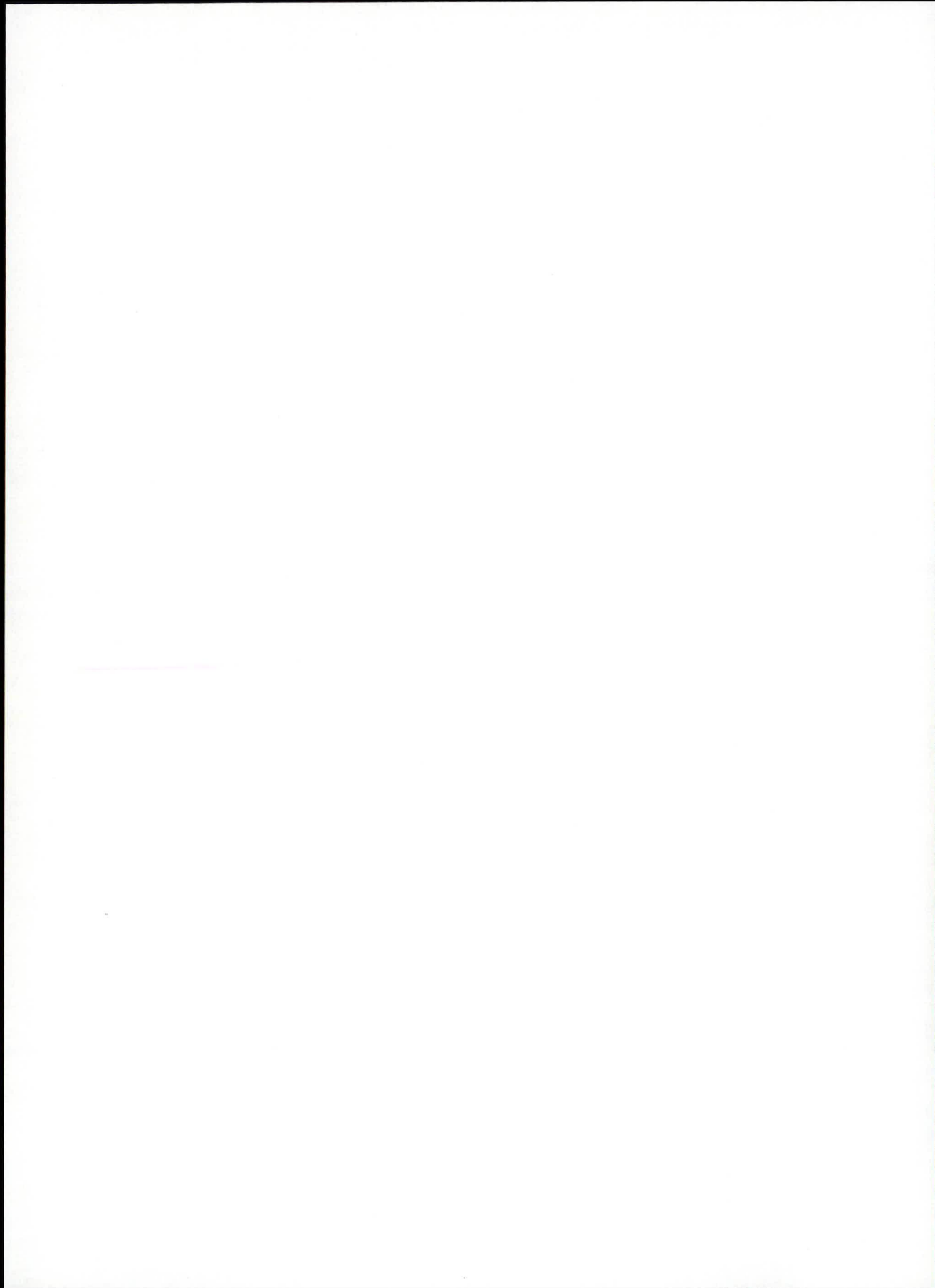
In contrast, the liver, the stomach, the roe and even the cheeks of the pike and the cod were not thrown away but made into 'gaffereyde' or 'butocken'. According to the recipe for 'gaffereyde' in the *Notabel boecxken* one must roast the head of a pike on a grill and slice the cheeks and the liver of the fish in little pieces and sauté them in butter or cole-seed oil and subsequently let it simmer with the strained roe, sugar and ginger powder. Spices are sprinkled on this dish when served.³⁰ In the Ghent cookbook, the 'butocken' – the intestines of a cod – are very well cooked and then finely chopped and braised in oil with sautéed onion, vinegar and cardamom. When ready to serve, powdered ginger is sprinkled on this dish.³¹

³⁰ Jansen-Sieben & Van der Molen-Willebrands 1994, p. 59, no. 143.

³¹ Jansen-Sieben & Van Winter 1998, pp. 123-124, no. 180.

CANCELLING OF THE COLD AND MOIST NATURE

What is striking about these recipes is that expensive spices such as ginger and cardamom were used in preparing fish parts nowadays considered as waste. Nothing in the medieval and early-modern kitchen was thrown away, at least not until it had been used as efficiently as possible. Fish was expensive, but those who could afford it often incorporated it in a meal on the many days on which flesh meat was forbidden by the church. In the official science of nutrition, fish was not perceived as healthy, but for wealthy people there was a way around this: preparing it with wine and spices cancelled out its cold and moist qualities. A balance was always sought so that justice could be done to the temperaments of all at table. After all, food was considered the key to health. 



**EXPENSIVE AND EXQUISITE
FISH BOOKS**

Carel Richter



EXQUISITE FISH BOOKS

A true fish book is only exquisite if it contains beautiful fish. What counts is the number and the splendour of the illustrations. The word exquisite is used here in the sense of beautiful, delectable and to a lesser extent charming and amusing. In his 1951 *Schöne Fischbücher*, Claus Nissen presented a selection of the most sumptuous antiquarian fish books to be found in libraries and private collections. He had a penchant for books with lovely woodcuts and hand-coloured engravings, only rarely including later works with photographs. The oldest books date from the Renaissance and were published between 1550 and 1560. A few older manuscripts with animal motifs from the Middle Ages (c. 350-1500) are known, but fish occur only sporadically in the margin decorations.

According to Nissen, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries combined yielded a mere 19 fish books with fine illustrations,¹ eleven of which are on view in the exhibition.

¹ Nissen 1972, p. 581.

MONASTERIES, PARCHMENT AND THE FIRST 'FISH BOOK'

People in the Middle Ages knew less about fish than the ancient Greeks and Romans. At the time, fish were considered as edible aquatic animals or even delicacies, as well as gruesome beings best to be avoided. Only a limited number of educated individuals had a greater understanding of fish, being familiar with the writings of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) and Pliny (23-79 A.D.).

Aristotle described approximately 115 fish species. He cut fish open, examined the entrails and reported on the insides of these aquatic animals. Moreover, he devoted much attention to the behaviour, reproduction and flavour as well as the compatibility between fish.² Pliny in turn studied the work of Aristotle and went on to describe some 30 new fish species. In categorising the fish within the animal kingdom he emphasised their physical dimensions and the characteristics of their habitat.³

² Aristotle 1910, vol. IV, pp. 486-633.

³ Rackham 1997, vol. III, pp. 165-289.

Until the twelfth century, manuscripts were produced solely by clerics. Within the confines of the monastery walls there was ample time to study theology, literature, music and nature. Well-known, for instance, are the fish stories by the abbess Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179). However, nuns and monks did not conduct experimental natural research nor did they dissect animals, and so the knowledge of the ancients faded into the background. There was virtually no literacy beyond the cloister walls. This situation changed when the economy began to improve in the fifteenth century. Laymen learned to read and write and manuscripts were increasingly produced by skilled craftsmen. A great demand emerged in the expanding cities for religious writings, which in composition and structure followed the Christian tradition of obligatory daily prayers. The texts of these books of hours were written on sheets of parchment illuminated in the margins with elegant garlands of flowers and leaves. Griffons, harpies, unicorns as well as true-to-life birds and insects were done in lead point and covered with body colour and gold leaf. The animals often had a mystic significance or represented a parody of the text. The decorations allowed one to quickly find a page in the manuscript.⁴

⁴ As-Vijvers 2000, pp. 4-57.

The invention of book printing in the mid-fifteenth century made possible the rapid dissemination of knowledge. Publishers began producing books in large numbers. Splendidly illustrated works were particularly lucrative, and books on animals also appeared in these years. The first Flemish work dates from 1506 and was intended for bird and fish enthusiasts. However, it is more of a manual for fishermen than for birdwatchers and therefore was referred to as 'the fish book' (het vischbok). The text by the anonymous author lacks a title page and opens with the sentence 'Little book teaching one how to catch birds and fish with one's hands or with other tricks such as bait, nets, traps and fishing rod and which types of fish are best at which time of the year.' Two woodcuts, one of an angler **fig. 1** and



fig. 1 Angler, from: Anonymous, *Boekje dat leert hoe men vogels en vissen met de handen en met andere truukjes zoals aas, netten, korven en de hengel kan vangen en op welke tijden van het jaar de vissoorten het best zijn*, 1506. Woodcut, folio 6 verso. © Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium



fig. 2 Fisherman with a dragnet and a herald, announcing the arrival of fresh fish, from: Anonymous, *Boekje dat leert hoe men vogels en vissen met de handen en met andere truukjes zoals aas, netten, korven en de hengel kan vangen en op welke tijden van het jaar de vissoorten het best zijn*, 1506. Woodcut, folio 4 recto. © Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium

⁵ Cockx-Indestege 1992, pp. 23-29.

one of a fisherman with a dragnet, **fig. 2** clarify the contents of the book, of which only one copy of the first edition has been preserved.⁵

THREE FISH SCHOLARS FROM THE RENAISSANCE

When the Greeks were driven out of Constantinople by the Turks in the fifteenth century, they took along their pre-Christian manuscripts to the West. In 1476 Theodorus Gaza translated Aristotle's zoological work from Greek to Latin and the opus, entitled *Natura Animalium*, was brought out

by a publisher in Venice. The translation was noted by many scholars and artists. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was the first to continue the comparative anatomy of Aristotle's research. His drawings of the skeletons and muscles of mammals, birds and fish excel in accuracy and to this day are still discussed in the literature on comparative anatomy.⁶

⁶ Cole 1949, pp. 49-55.

Aristotle's work also inspired three Renaissance fish experts. Around the same time, Pierre Belon (1517-1564), Guillaume Rondelet (1507-1566) and Ippolito Salviani (1514-1572) independently studied the science of aquatic animals in volume four of the *Natura Animalium*. Aristotle's pronouncements on fish were respectfully quoted and rarely contradicted by these ichthyologists in their books. His notions are summarised below.

Aquatic animals were classified on the basis of the presence of legs, fins, scales and a cartilaginous skeleton. Fish have fins rather than legs and can be subdivided in groups with two, four or no fins. Female fish have a uterus on both sides of their body in which they can carry eggs or young fish. Fish with scales lay eggs and fish with cartilage generally are viviparous. Male fish do not have genitals, but rather two tubes leading from the midriff on either side of the spine to the tail where they merge into a single tube that opens out. During the reproductive season the tubes fill up with sperm. Almost all species of fish are particularly delicious when they begin to reproduce. This does not apply to fish from rivers and lakes, for these are tastier after having reproduced. All fish have blood. They have eyes but no auditory or olfactory organs. They also have no voice because they lack lungs and windpipes. However, they can make noises with their gills or with structures in their stomachs. Taken together, fish constitute a genus within which many species or kinds can be distinguished. Fish species that swim in schools are friendly to each other and species that do not are enemies. Whales are mammals and together form a separate genus.

Pierre Belon was the first to publish his observations on aquatic animals. In the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés he wrote his renowned *L'histoire naturelle des estranges poissons marins* (1551) and *La nature & diversité*

des poissons, avec leurs pourtraicts, representez au plus pres du naturel (1555) (cat. no. 62). Superb woodcuts of mammals, reptiles, fish, crabs, lobsters, oysters, cockles and mythical creatures illustrate the texts. He collected the animals for his research in West Europe and several countries along the eastern section of the Mediterranean. They included strange, hitherto unknown specimens. In describing the kinship of the species, he considered the differences in the build of the skeleton, the number of legs or fins, the manner of reproduction and the shape of the body. Following Pliny's example, in compiling the classification he attached a great deal of importance to the dimensions of the body and the features of the habitat. Small fish were divided into species that swim on the surface, that occur at the water's edge, or that are found in rocky areas. Large fish comprise viviparous fish with a bony skeleton such as whales, viviparous fish with a cartilaginous skeleton such as sharks, and egg-laying fish with spines instead of bones such as tuna and swordfish.⁷ **fig. 3** Belon's classification did not improve on Aristotle's work.

⁷ Pietsch 1995, p. 109.

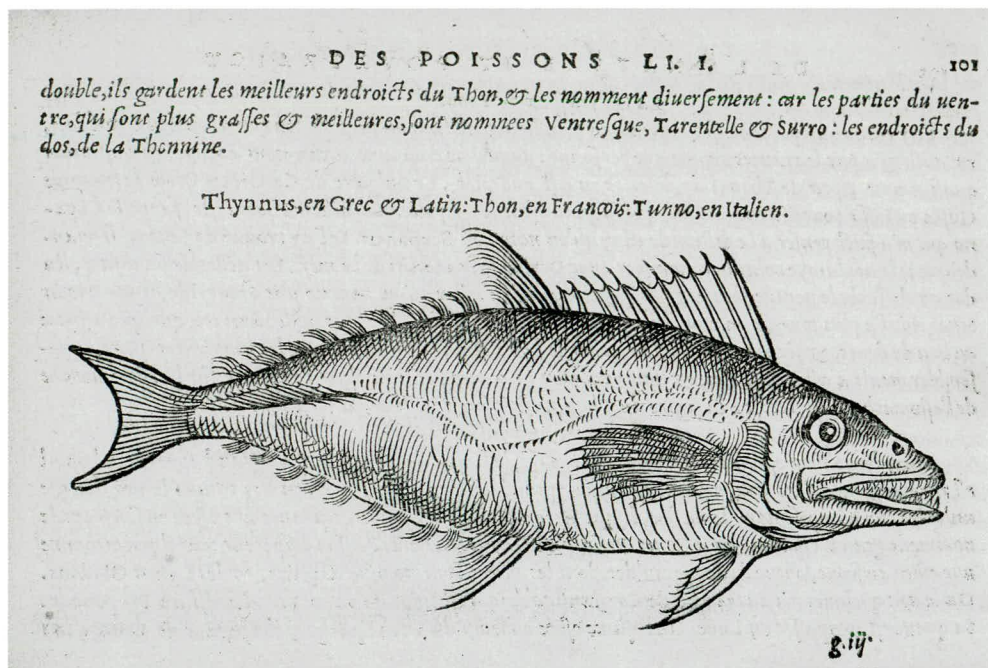


fig. 3 Tuna, from: Pierre Belon, *La nature et diversité des poissons, avec leurs pourtraicts, representez au plus pres du naturel*, 1555. Woodcut. Amsterdam, Rare Fishbooks Antiquarian Booksellers. Photo: Ernst Moritz, The Hague

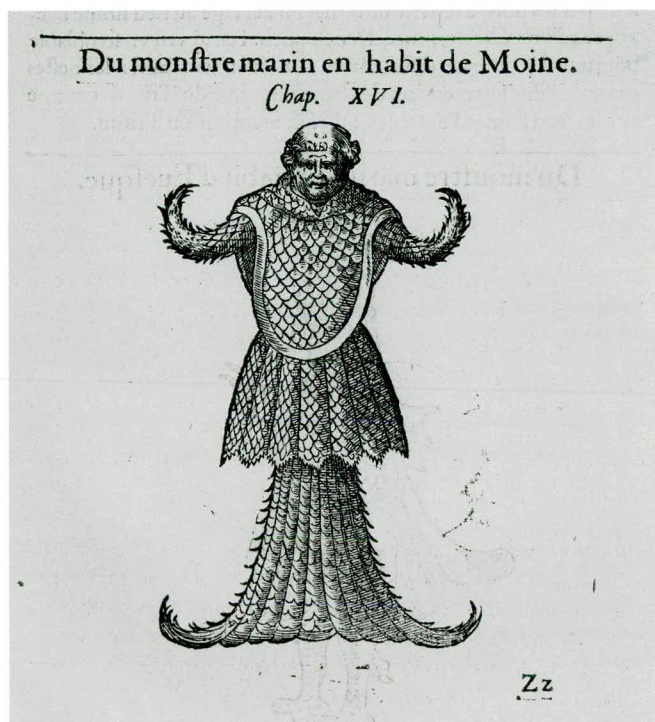


fig. 4 Sea monster wearing religious vestments, from: Guillaume Rondelet, *L'histoire entiere des poissons*, 1558. Woodcut. Amsterdam, Artis Library, University of Amsterdam. Photo: Ernst Moritz, The Hague

Guillaume Rondelet, a colleague of Belon, also focused on describing and classifying aquatic animals. The material for his investigation came from France's fresh-water regions and the Mediterranean Sea. His *L'histoire entiere des poissons* (1558) (cat. no. 63) includes a precise illustration of each aquatic animal with the features crucial for identifying the species. Rondelet was the first to publish illustrations of the sea monk and sea bishop, **fig. 4** whose existence he did not doubt! These woodcuts of monsters clad in religious vestments were adopted by other authors into the eighteenth century. Whales, seals, turtles, fish, lobsters, snails and worms receive extensive coverage in the book. The Greek, Latin and French names have been added to the descriptions and the fish are categorised in groups such as perch, wrasse, mackerel, mullet, ray, shark and eel. Rondelet distinguished

97 marine and 147 freshwater fish species. The medicinal properties of fish and their culinary preparation were sometimes included in the ichthyological descriptions.⁸

⁸ Hamilton 1852-1854, pp. 17-44.

As the personal physician of Pope Julius III and subsequently of Marcellus II and Paul III, Ippolito Salviani held an important position within the Vatican (cat. no. 64), and was able to spend much time on zoological research. In the first chapter of his beautifully illustrated *Aquatilium Animalium* (1554-1558) he provides a 56-page table with the Latin names of several hundred aquatic animals that were recorded by Greek and Roman writers from antiquity. **fig. 5** In Salviani's list, the sea monsters are not considered as real fish. Although this pronouncement is not made for mammals, reptiles and amphibians, it is significant that Salviani does not include these animal classes in his investigation of fish.⁹ The second chapter is devoted to his own observations. For his investigation, Salviani bought the fish and squid himself at the market in Rome. Immediately after purchasing them, he dissected, mounted, drew, and identified them on the basis of the literature. His book contains 95 fish and 4 squid, including many new species. The engravings, which Salviani printed on his own press, are rendered in minute detail and sometimes fill an entire page.

⁹ Bushnan 1845-1846, pp. 17-43.

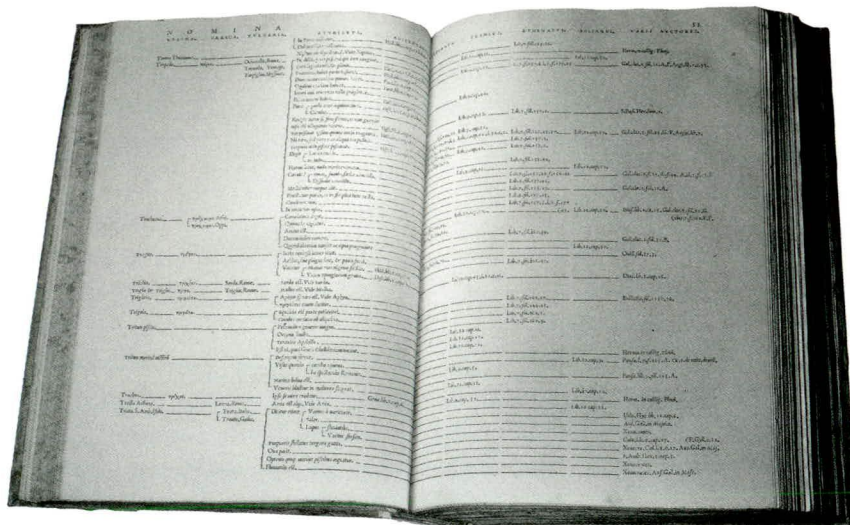


fig. 5 Table from Ippolito Salviani, *Aquatilium Animalium*, 1554-1558.

Amsterdam, Rare Fishbooks Antiquarian Booksellers.

Photo: Ernst Moritz, The Hague

The great merit of these three Renaissance scholars is that many new fish species were identified and beautifully illustrated, and a beginning was made with a taxonomy of fish.¹⁰

¹⁰ Wightman 1962, pp. 200-201.

SPERM WHALES AND MERMAIDS

The Swiss zoologist Conrad Gessner (1516-1566) wanted to compile an encyclopaedia of plants and animals for a large public. He concentrated on the literature of antiquity and the Renaissance and incorporated various texts from the books of his predecessors in this opus. Several draughtsmen and engravers were involved in copying the woodcuts and engravings. His own information and the drawings of new species constituted a valuable addition to zoology at the time.¹¹ The first volumes of his *Historia Animalium* were published between 1551 and 1558, and include the Latin names of several thousand animals in alphabetical order. In his foreword, Gessner states that he wanted to make the most reliable possible guide leading to the knowledge of God.

¹¹ Gmelig-Nijboer 1977, pp. 109-120.

The fourth volume of the encyclopaedia is devoted to aquatic animals and is subtitled *Qui est de Piscium & Aquatiliū* (cat. no. 65). Around 700 woodcuts of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, crabs, lobsters, shellfish and mythological creatures enhance this outstanding work. Intriguing are the sperm whale-like monsters, which Gessner classified under whales. The animals are depicted with large blowholes and terrifying fangs which they use to attack whaling ships. **fig. 6** The crew attempts to ward off the monsters with trumpet blasts. The heavy barrels on board meant for storing whale meat are being dumped overboard so that the boat can pick up speed and escape. These mythological elements recur in the work of sixteenth-century marine painters from Flanders and Holland. For instance, the seascape by Hans Savery the Elder (1564/65-after 1626) in the collection of the Netherlands Maritime Museum presents billowing waves with sailing vessels, drifting barrels and two monstrous fish. **fig. 7** The work can be interpreted as an allegory of Amsterdam at the end of the sixteenth century.

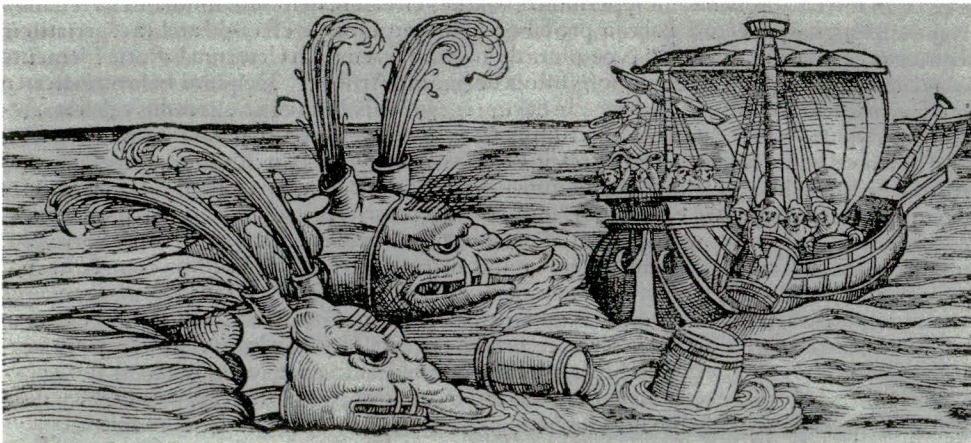


fig. 6 Two monster-like sperm whales, a whaler and drifting barrels in the sea, from: Conrad Gessner, *Historia Animalium liber IIII. Qui est de Piscium & Aquatiliū*, 1551-1558. Woodcut. Amsterdam, Rare Fishbooks Antiquarian Booksellers.
Photo: Ernst Moritz, The Hague



fig. 7 Hans Savery the Elder, *A stormy sea with sailing ships, drifting barrels and two monstrous fish*, c. 1600. Oil on canvas, 87,5 x 156 cm. Amsterdam, The Netherlands Maritime Museum

The stormy sea can thus be understood as a metaphor of the turbulent times the city had experienced, with the monsters assuming the role of the Spaniards.¹²

¹² Daalder 2003, pp. 1-3.

The first Dutch animal encyclopaedia appeared in 1660 and was entitled *Naeukeurige beschryving van de natuur der viervoetige dieren, vissen, en bloedeloze waterdieren, vogelen, kronkeldieren, slangen en draken* (Precise description of the nature of quadrupeds, fish and bloodless aquatic animals, birds, twisting creatures, snakes and dragons) (cat. no. 66). Its author, Johannes Jonston (1603-1675), provides a summary of the most important animal books from the Renaissance and the first half of the seventeenth century. This voluminous and exquisitely illustrated work will have graced the bookshelves of many a Dutch living room in the second half of the seventeenth century. In the chapters on fish no distinction is made between mystical aquatic beings and animals that were part of daily reality.¹³ Writing about the anthropomorphous, Jonston noted that it is caught at certain times of the year in the East Indian Sea near the islands of the Picts, located south of the present Philippines. 'It is a fish entirely human in shape, which they therefore refer to as *Pecche Muger*, or Woman Fish, and is called *Duyon* by the inhabitants. It has a round head, attached directly to its trunk. The reproductive organs of both sexes cannot be distinguished from those of humans, and after these it ends in a fish. The bones of this fish are extremely powerful agents for reducing or increasing the flow of blood: and those of the Women or mermaids are stronger yet'.¹⁴ fig. 8 A comparable drawing

¹³ Dance 1978, pp. 8-42.

¹⁴ Jonston 1660, p. 168.

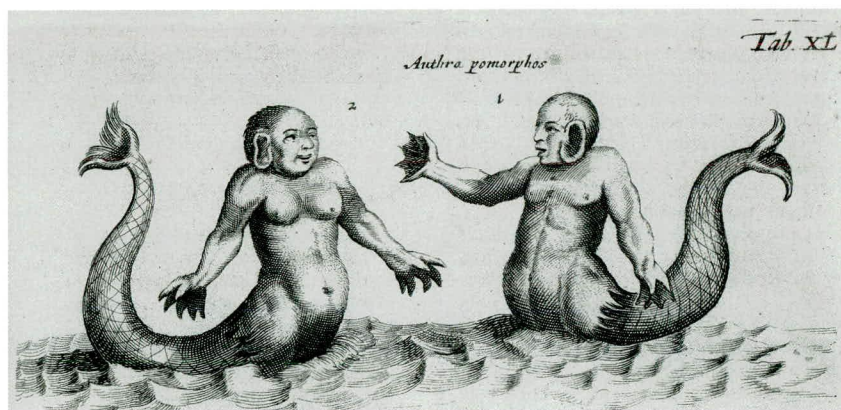


fig. 8 Mermaid and merman, from: Johannes Jonston, *Naeukeurige beschryving van de natuur der viervoetige dieren, vissen, en bloedeloze waterdieren, vogelen, kronkeldieren, slangen en draken*, 1660. Engraving. Amsterdam, Rare Fishbooks Antiquarian Booksellers.
Photo: Ernst Moritz, The Hague

of a woman-fish is found in the *Album met gekleurde tekeningen van tropische vissen, krabben en kreeften uit de Indische en Pacifische Oceaan* (Album with coloured drawings of tropical fish, crabs and lobsters from the Indian and Pacific Ocean) by Samuel Fallours (1710). He worked for the Dutch East India Company as a soldier and later as a visitor of the sick on the island of Ambon. Commissioned by Baltazar Coyett, governor of Banda and Ambon, he drew the fish found in the islands' coastal waters between 1694 and 1708.¹⁵ The mermaid in Fallours' book is probably a *dugong*, *duyong* or sea cow, which was considered semi-human by the people of the Moluccas in the seventeenth century.

PICTURE ALBUMS WITH FISH

Adriaen Collaert (c. 1560-1618) was a draughtsman and an engraver in Antwerp married to the daughter of the engraver and print publisher Philip Galle. His father-in-law surely stimulated him to produce the engravings for his ravishing *Piscium vivae icones* (c. 1610) (cat. no. 67). Views of aquatic animals set in exotic landscapes with harbours, castles, ships and fishermen are characteristic of Collaert's work. **fig. 9** He poked fun at the relative sizes of the species and their dimensions *vis à vis* their habitat. The animals figure in the foreground of the composition. The fish, lobsters, seals and shellfish are delineated with scientific precision and Rondelet's influence is unmistakably evident. The Latin name of the species and sometimes that of the genus are included in the engravings.

Albert Flamen from Bruges was a painter, draughtsman and an engraver of landscapes with fish. He worked in Paris from 1648 to 1669. His album *Icones Diversorium Piscium* (1664) (cat. no. 68) contains engravings resembling Collaert's compositions. **fig. 10** Flamen, however, situated the aquatic animals in realistic landscapes against a background of ditches, rivers, lakes and harbours. The scenes with fishermen, rowing boats, sailing ships, drift nets, seines, traps and fishing rods make clear that the artist was well-acquainted with fishery. The Latin and French names of the species are often mentioned below the engravings.

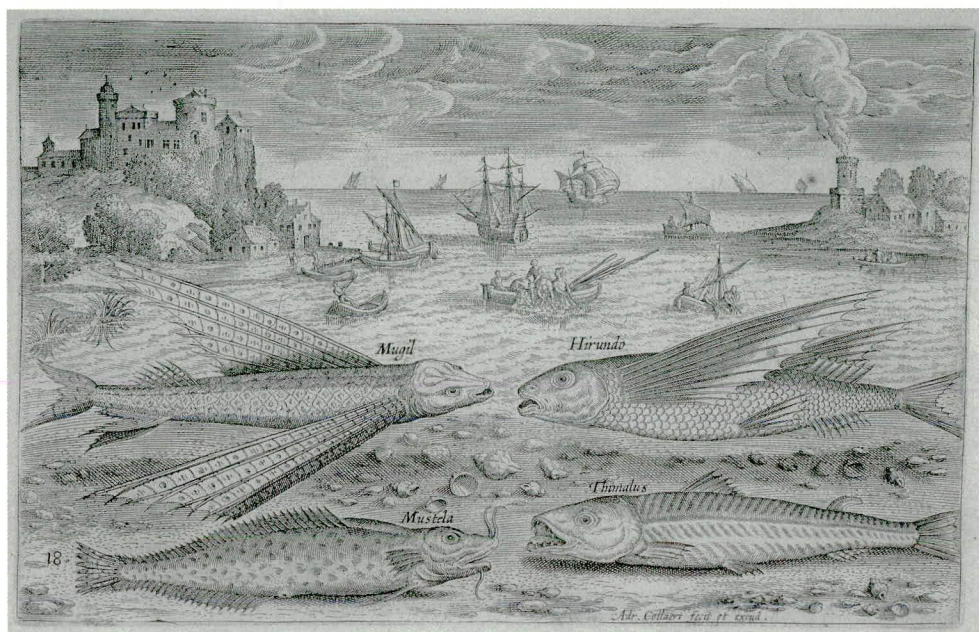


fig. 9 A mullet, a cod, a gurnard and a grayling with a harbour in the background, from: Adriaen Collaert, *Piscium vivae icones*, c. 1610. Engraving. Louvain, Catholic University of Louvain Library. Photo: Ernst Moritz, The Hague

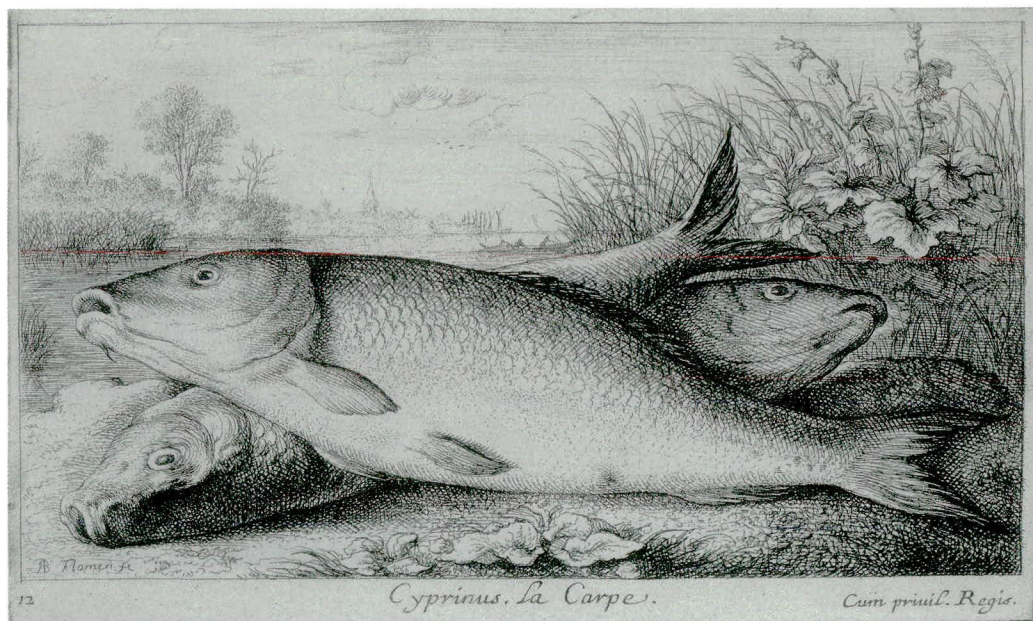


fig. 10 Three carps at the edge of a pool, from: Albert Flamen, *Icones Diversorium Piscium*, 1664. Engraving. 't Goy-Houten, Forum Antiquarian Booksellers. Photo: Ernst Moritz, The Hague

Collaert's and Flamen's albums certainly served as guides for identifying fish and other aquatic animals and, moreover, the attractive engravings will have been used for decorative purposes.

¹⁶ Becker 1980, p. 15.

In the seventeenth century, painters, draughtsmen, etchers, engravers, printers and publishers were all members of the same guild. This proximity often stimulated the exchange of ideas and collaborative endeavours. For example, Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) designed more than 80 title pages for books,¹⁶ while Jan van Kessel (1626-1673) specialised in small paintings of flowers, insects, shells, molluscs, fish and birds. He consulted scientific treatises with illustrations of plants and animals to ensure the utmost precision in his paintings. One of his works presents a coastal view and a collection of fish, shells and a squid on the beach. **fig. 11** Van Kessel probably derived this curious combination of a still life of dead aquatic animals set in a bizarre landscape from Collaert.



fig. 11 Jan van Kessel I, *Sea fish on the shore*, c. 1660-1665.

Oil on panel, 24 x 32.4 cm. Amsterdam, P. de Boer Gallery

DUTCH FISH FAUNA IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The first list of Dutch fish fauna was published by the Italian Ulysis Aldrovandi (1522-1605) in his 1613 *De piscibus libri V et de cetis lib. Unus*. The list includes about 40 species with their common names (cat. no. 69). Aldrovandi was a professor at the University of Bologna. His encyclopaedia of animals counts 14 volumes and the fifth volume devoted to fish was left unfinished at the time of his death. He was succeeded by Johannes Cornelis Uterverius from Delft. Working from Aldrovandi's annotations, Uterverius was able to complete *De piscibus libri V et de cetis lib. Unus*, to which he added the list of Dutch fish species.

Fish species were often ascribed various names in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. For instance, in Aldrovandi's descriptions, cod is found under the names *aberdhaen*, *bolck*, *stockfish* and *cabaliau*. Generally speaking, the more commercially important a species is the more names it bears. The synonyms relate to shape, age, behaviour and the method used for conservation.

Other commercially fished species at the time were eel (*ael*), sardine (*buckin*), herring (*harinch*), plaice (*scholle*), sole (*tonge*), sea trout (*voren*) and mackerel (*zeehaen*). Missing from the list is salmon, a species from the large rivers that was of great economic significance in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Small, and for the fishing industry uninteresting species such as the stickleback (*stinckfish*), loach (*musc*) and goby (*pen*) are also included in the list. Evidently, Aldrovandi's interest in fish was that of a nature lover.

The fish fauna gradually altered after the seventeenth century. Commercially important species such as sturgeon, salmon, allis shad and swordfish (*svueertfisch*) eventually disappeared from the Dutch waters.¹⁷ **fig. 12**

¹⁷ Nijssen & De Groot 1987, pp. 51-223.

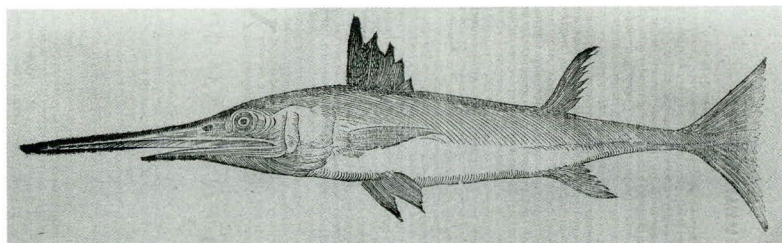


fig. 12 Swordfish, from: Ulysis Aldrovandi, *De piscibus libri V et de cetis lib. Unus*, 1613.

Woodcut. Amsterdam, Rare Fishbooks Antiquarian Booksellers. Photo: Ernst Moritz, The Hague

UNDERSIZED FISH IN BAVARIA

In the sixteenth century Bavaria had a rich freshwater fauna and fresh fish and lobster were a staple of many people's daily diet. The Danube and the Bavarian lakes were heavily fished and the government decided it was necessary to clamp down on this. *The Bairische Landts Ordnung* (1553), a civil code, contains regulations intended to discourage overfishing (cat. no. 70). There were rules for the use of fishing gear and for the minimum length of caught fish. The fish in question were chub, salmon, grayling, brook trout, roach, barbel, pike, asp, carp, bream and crayfish. This tome contains fold-out woodcuts of these species. Particular attention was paid to the shape of the head, the relationship between the body's height and length, and where the fins were attached. The contorted posture of some of the fish indicates that dead specimens were used as the models. The lengths of the species in the woodcuts correspond with those required for them to be fished legally. A ruler is also depicted life-size, allowing the legislator to rapidly ascertain the length of the fish, and whether undersize fish had been returned to the water immediately after having been caught.

JOHAN MAURITS VAN NASSAU-SIEGEN AND THE BRAZILIAN FISH FAUNA

The seven northern provinces of the Low Countries founded the Republic of the United Netherlands in 1581 and declared its independence from Spain. Navigation and shipping expanded, bringing soldiers, merchants, civil servants, missionaries, physicians and natural scientists to the far-flung corners of the world. The Dutch studied the religions, morals, health, and the flora and fauna of still unknown countries. Publishers were more than eager to publish the results of these travels in book form.

The Dutch West India Company wrested North Brazil from the Spaniards from 1630 to 1637. Johan Maurits, Count of Nassau-Siegen and second cousin of William the Silent, became governor of the new colony. He commissioned Willem Piso (1611-1678) and his assistant Georg Marcgrave (1610-1644) to investigate the natural produce and the public health of

the country. In the succeeding years they also studied its climate, astronomy, tropical diseases, minerals, as well as its flora and fauna. Entitled *Historia naturalis Brasiliae* (1648), their comprehensive scientific investigation was published by Hackius in Leiden and Elzevier in Amsterdam (cat. no. 71).¹⁸ The authors describe more than 90 previously unknown fish species, including batfish, squirrelfish, cornetfish and guitarfish. The precise engravings of these fish were incorporated in natural history treatises into the nineteenth century. Piso and Marcgrave pointed out that the faunas of the Old and the New World differed distinctly from one another and they did not subscribe to the generally accepted view that after the deluge animals dispersed from a single centre.¹⁹

¹⁸ Piso & Marcgrave 1648, pp. 141-182.

¹⁹ Antwerp/The Hague/Brussels 1969, p. 38.

A SPONSOR FOR EVERY ENGRAVING

The English scholars Francis Willughby (1635-1672) and John Ray (1627-1705) became acquainted at the University of Cambridge and shared an interest in the taxonomy of birds and fish. They travelled throughout the Netherlands, France, Germany and Italy from 1663 to 1666 gathering material for their investigation. The description and classification of the fish were compared to the information provided by authors from Classical Antiquity, the Renaissance and their own time.

Willughby and Ray divided the fish into the classes of whales, cartilaginous fish and bony fish, which in turn were subdivided into 20 families. Mythical creatures are no longer to be found in the work of the English scientists. The book was titled *De Historia Piscium* and contains several hundred engravings (cat. no. 72). Most of the illustrations were taken from the renowned works by the Renaissance naturalists and Piso and Marcgrave. The engravings are generally printed in reverse. This is the case, for example, for all of the illustrations adopted from Rondelet's 1558 *L'histoire entiere des poissons*. **figs. 13 and 14** On the other hand, the complicated engravings in Salviani's *Aquatilium Animalium* (1554-1558) were not printed in reverse and thus one wonders whether Willughby and Ray copied the original copper plates. **figs. 15 and 16**

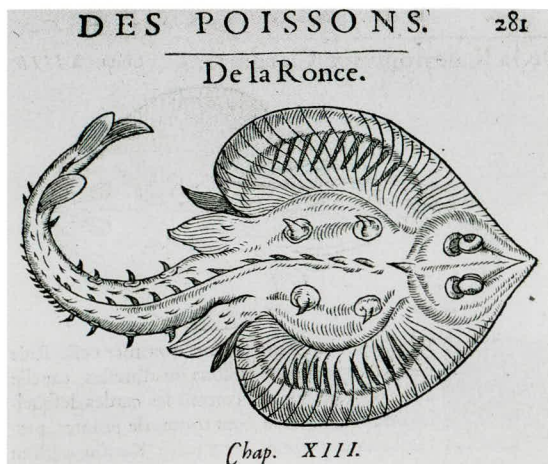


fig. 13 Thornback ray, from: Guillaume Rondelet, *L'histoire entiere des poissons*, 1558. Woodcut. Amsterdam, Artis Library, University of Amsterdam. Photo: Ernst Moritz, The Hague

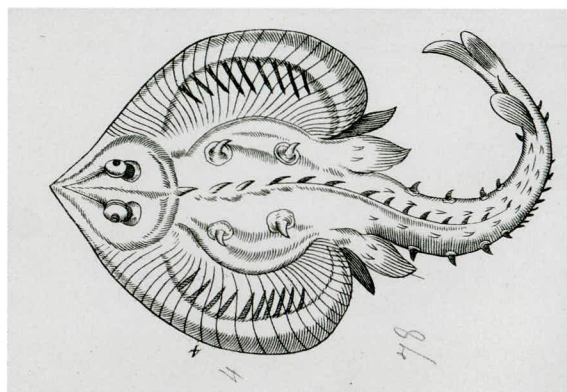


fig. 14 Thornback ray, from: Francis Willughby and John Ray, *De Historia Piscium*, 1686. Engraving. Amsterdam, Rare Fishbooks Antiquarian Booksellers. Photo: Ernst Moritz, The Hague

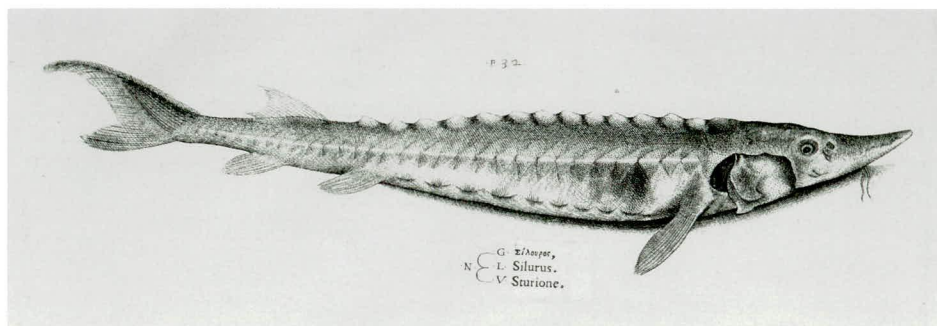


fig. 15 Sturgeon, from: Ippolito Salviani, *Aquatilium Animalium*, 1554-1558. Engraving. Amsterdam, Rare Fishbooks Antiquarian Booksellers. Photo: Ernst Moritz, The Hague

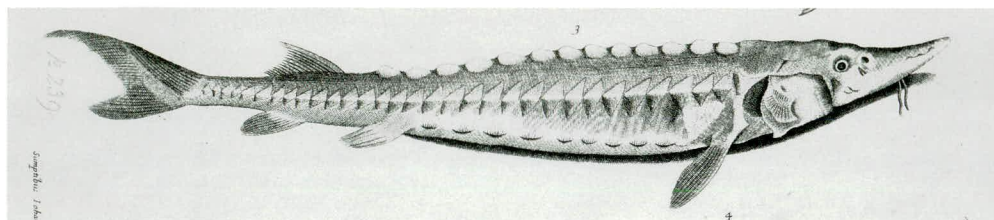


fig. 16 Sturgeon, from: Francis Willughby and John Ray, *De Historia Piscium*, 1686. Engraving. Amsterdam, Rare Fishbooks Antiquarian Booksellers. Photo: Ernst Moritz, The Hague

Willughby had died by the time *De Historia Piscium* was completed in 1686 and Ray did not have the financial means to publish the work. Bishop John Fell was prepared to cover the printing costs and several members of the Royal Society offered to pay for the production of the engravings. In gratitude, the sponsor's name was added below each engraving.

De Historia Piscium set the tone in its classification of fish in the animal kingdom until Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778) revised it in the tenth edition of his *Systema Naturae* (1758).²⁰

²⁰ Linnaeus 1758, pp. 239-338.

THE PRIVATE COLLEGE OF AMSTERDAM

Around 1664, Gerard Blasius (1625-1692), professor of medicine at the University of Amsterdam, founded the first society for the comparative anatomy of animals in Europe. The society was named the *Collegium privatum Amstelodamense*; the word 'privatum' meant that membership was by invitation only. Members of distinction included Jan Swammerdam (1637-1680), an entomologist, Matthias Slade (1628-1689), physician at the municipal hospital of St. Peter, and Egbert Veen, physician at the Chamber of the Admiralty.²¹ The scientists were keenly interested in the structure of the entrails of vertebrates and in particular that of fish. In the first months of 1672 they devoted 11 meetings to an investigation of the pancreas of the red gurnard (*knorhaan*), the perch, the eel, the carp, the sturgeon and the sprat (*panharinck*). The fish were dissected in the home of one of the members. Precision, patience and passion for the art of dissection were highly regarded by these Amsterdammers. During one of the sessions, the excretory duct of the pancreas of the eel proved difficult to separate from the intestines. The researchers spent two hours working with fine dissection needles before succeeding. Jan Swammerdam made meticulous drawings of the dissected fish and wrote all of the reports on the observations of the bowels. With the society's approval, the results of the investigation were published by Blasius in his *Anatome Animalium* (1681).²² fig. 17

²¹ Lindeboom 1975, pp. 7-28.

²² Blasius 1681, p. 473.

COSTLY FISH BOOKS

The archive of the Vereeniging ter Bevordering van de Belangen des Boekhandels (Society for the Promotion of the Interests of Book Dealers) contains a price list from 1658, an appraisal of the library of a Middelburg patrician. From it, we learn that a Mercator atlas cost five guilders, De Brune's *Emblemata* two guilders and the prices of scientific treatises, to which the fish books from the sixteenth and seventeenth century may be counted, ranged between three and five guilders. They were costly books at the time, even for a midwife, a schoolmaster and a preacher with annual salaries ranging from 150 to 200 guilders.²³

²³ Schama 1998, p. 614.

Fish books from the Renaissance and the Golden Age are rarely offered at present-day international antiquarian fairs. They fetch prices between 7000 and 50,000 Euro, and hence are still costly books, which continue to be difficult to obtain for many a fish lover even in the twenty-first century. 🐟

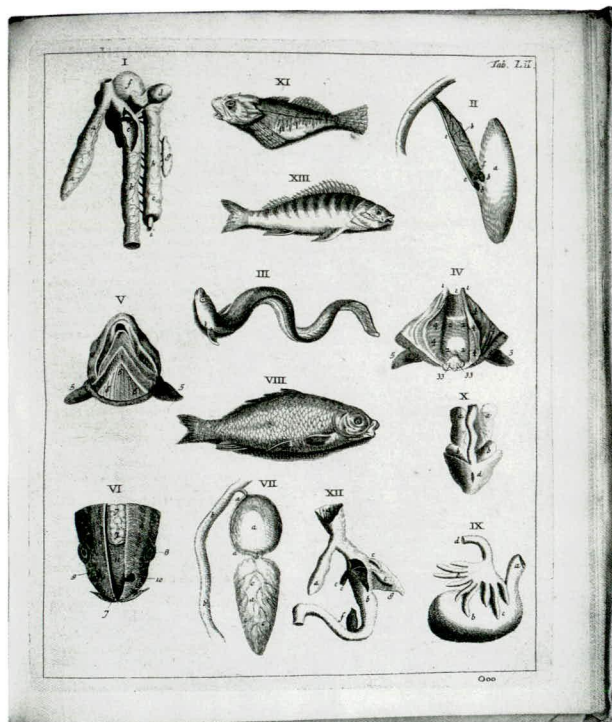


fig. 17 Dissected fish, including a red gurnard, a perch, an eel and a carp, from: Gerard Blasius, *Anatome Animalium*, 1681. Engraving. Amsterdam, Artis Library, University of Amsterdam.
Photo: Ernst Moritz, The Hague

A MISCELLANY OF FISHES

Lex Raat



Approximately 50 different fish species are portrayed in the 63 paintings included in this catalogue. They are literally 'fish out of water', the most unsuitable environment for live fish, and are displayed in the stalls of fish dealers and in still lifes.

The artists did not paint the fish with the intention of distinguishing individual species from one another. The fish are presented in a variety of positions whereby the features crucial for identification often cannot be observed. For instance, the correct placement of dorsal, pectoral and pelvic fins frequently cannot be determined. Moreover, the fins are usually painted flat against the fish's body, as they are normally seen out of water, making it impossible to ascertain their shape and size. Many fish are represented dressed for preparation in the kitchen so that information about the colour and the scales is lost. Haddock and whiting are often shown split; herring gutted, pickled or smoked; eel is sometimes sliced into pieces; and salmon is frequently present only in the form of steaks. As for sharks, only their tails and eggs can be seen in some paintings.

Accordingly, it is not always possible to determine precisely which species of fish is depicted. This is particularly true for rays and flatfish. Discriminating between plaice and flounder can hardly be done from the ventral side, and halibut, turbot, dab and brill are difficult to distinguish from one another in the paintings. Nevertheless, due to the realistic depiction of the fish, the species can often be identified by the shape of the mouth, tail and scales. The colour of the fish and the proportions of the body parts are usually well rendered, in contrast to the illustrations of fish in contemporary fish books. The quality of the depictions of fish in these tomes pales when compared to those in the exhibited paintings. However, for identification purposes, illustrators of fish books took care to record the most important external features of each species.

Market scenes and still lifes usually include both freshwater and saltwater fish. The paintings afford insight into what species were available at the local market. Not surprisingly, the most commonly depicted fish are those that could be simply caught with contemporary boats and tackle in the Dutch inland, coastal and North Sea (offshore) fisheries. Rare and exotic species are not encountered in these paintings. It is noteworthy that the majority of the fish shown are described by Carolus Linnaeus in the tenth edition of his *Systema Naturae* (1758), the treatise that summarised contemporary knowledge of fauna and provided the scientific names. The fish species depicted in the paintings are also virtually all, recognisably, present in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century encyclopaedic fish books (see the essay by Carel Richter).

Some of the species portrayed have since vanished from the Dutch waters. For example the sturgeon, once found in the Rhine and Meuse River basin, and illustrated in seven of the paintings on show, is now an extinct species. Salmon, allis shad and *coregonidae* such as houting, powan and vendace are also no longer part of the present-day fish fauna of the Netherlands. On the other hand, pike perch (better known as zander), nowadays one of the most widespread predatory fish species in the Netherlands, is not portrayed in the paintings and has only been caught here since 1885. However, the Northern pike, a typical freshwater predatory fish, can be identified in no less than 18 paintings. This is an indication that the landscape – then rich in shallow, densely vegetated clear waters and flooded grasslands in the spring in which Northern pike spawned and the larvae grew – was optimal for the development of this species.

Notable is the presence of common carp in 15 of the paintings. This species is said to have come from the Danube River basin and been introduced by religious orders into the Netherlands in the Middle Ages. Cultivated in ponds, this fish found its way onto the menus of the monks during the Lenten season (see the essay by J.M. van Winter). Other sources speak of the introduction of this species into West Europe in Roman times. What is clear is that the common carp, which was widely cultivated, was readily accessible to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century painters. Moreover, it is curious indeed that a species as appealing to the imagination as the wels or

European catfish, the greatest predatory fish of our inland waterways, is not depicted. Evidently this fish had no commercial value. However, it must have been caught on a regular basis in the west Netherlandish lake and polder area.

In the following section, the various species portrayed in the paintings are illustrated and provided with brief descriptions containing information about their natural history. In addition, details concerning the present distribution of the species are noted and reference is regularly made to their present conservation status. The descriptions are by Dr. W. van Emmerik (OVB), and summarised from the publications mentioned in the references.

In the descriptions, the term pelagic refers to an existence in open water. Herring and mackerel, as well as roach and zander, are examples of pelagic species. This is in contrast to benthic types living near or on the bottom. Examples of bottom-dwelling fish are bream, common carp and eel. Moreover, a distinction is made between migratory fish and sedentary fish (resident species). Migratory fish in turn may be divided into anadromous species, such as sturgeon, salmon and sea trout, which reproduce in freshwater but live most of their adult life in the sea or ocean, and catadromous species such as the European eel which, conversely, reproduces in saltwater and matures in freshwater.

The Species Survival Commission (SSC) is a special organ of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), which for four decades has been collecting data on threatened animal species. They are included in the so-called *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* (www.iucnredlist.org). One of the goals set for 2003 was to draft a complete survey of freshwater fish (approximately 10,000 species). The Netherlands Nature Policy Scheme (1990) of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Conservation and Fishing (since 2003 the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality) promotes projects whose specific aim is to protect threatened species. For example, in 1994 a beginning was made on compiling Red Lists comparable to that of the IUCN. In 1998 the Dutch Red List of lamprey and freshwater fish was published.

The illustrations of fish in this compendium are taken from: Muus et al. 1999 (publisher: Schuyt & Co., Haarlem) and *De Nederlandse zoetwatervissen* (OVB 2002) (photographs: Mieke van Engelen Photographic Agency).



barbel ▲

The barbel zone of the river is in the middle reaches. Characteristic of this habitat are fluctuations in the river's rate of flow (an average of 15 to 120 cm/s) and variations in the structure of the river-bed (gravel, sand) and banks (vegetation, hiding places). The barbel's body and fins are adapted to hug the bottom, even in strong currents and so it never leaps and rarely climbs fish ladders or weirs as a salmon would. Late in the spring the fish travel upstream in schools and spawn in shallow, rapidly flowing water (30 to 40 cm deep) above clean, level gravel beds.

In the Netherlands, barbel are found chiefly in the major rivers and in some streams in the province of Limburg, primarily east of the Meuse River. Barbel declined greatly in the Meuse in the 1960s. There appears to have been an observable increase in their number as of the 1990s. However, because barbel are also sometimes stocked in the Limburg streams, it is not clear whether this increase is natural. Barbel are sensitive to a decrease in the oxygen saturation of the water, canalisation, temperatures that are too high, barriers in the migration route and probably pollution.

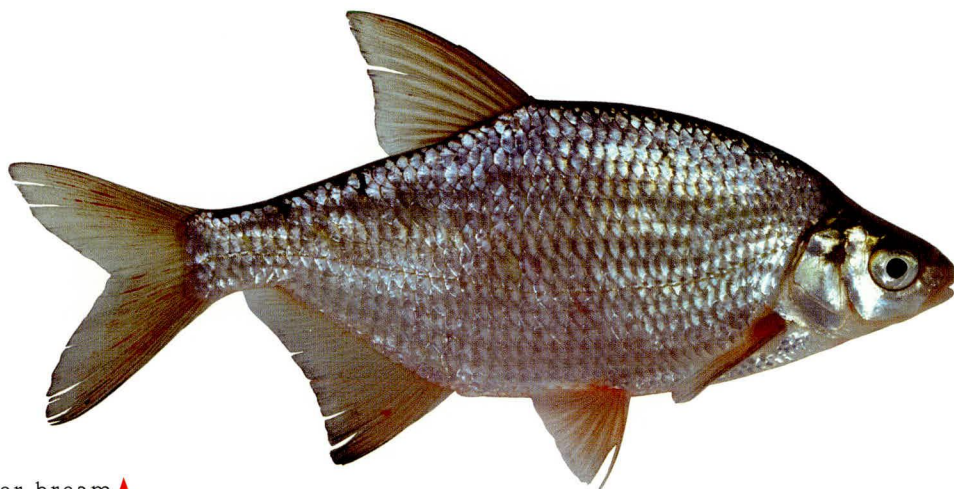
blonde ray – see rays



bream:

bream ▲

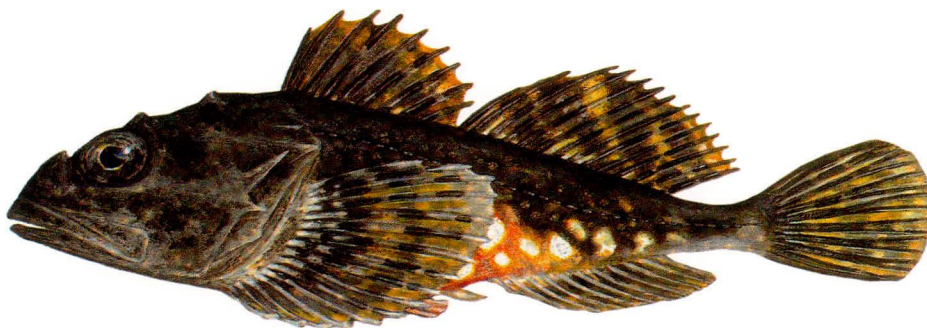
Bream chiefly eat food found on or near the river bed. They churn up the silt with their bulging mouths making the water turbid. Bream rank together with roach among the most common species of fish in the Netherlands. They are found in slow-flowing lowland reaches of rivers often called the 'bream zone', and in lakes, but they can also survive in very turbid eutrophic waters. The best specimens are found in clear, densely vegetated water where water plants usually serve as spawning substrate, but bream are not bound to their presence and deposit the eggs on other hard objects as well.



silver bream ▲

Silver bream live in slow-flowing or still, preferably overgrown water chiefly along the banks or in old distributaries in the downstream areas of rivers. In lakes, silver bream mostly remain near the vegetated bank zone. Usually they stay close to the bottom, often in mixed schools with bream. Silver bream usually spawn in groups in May and June. The species prefers to spawn in dense growth but can do without if necessary. In the Netherlands, silver bream live chiefly in the rivers, and in large lakes and ponds. They are virtually never found in the province of Zeeland.

brown trout – see trout



bull rout ▲

Bull rout live on rocky bottoms with sand and mud in the seaweed zone at depths of a few to 200 metres. The species is also found in brackish water; it prefers the presence of mussel beds. Bull rout spawn in the winter, laying packages of eggs between stones, which are then guarded by the male. Male bull rout have a red belly with white spots. The species is relatively common along the Dutch coast, also near piers and dikes. Bull rout have also been caught in the North Sea Canal.



burbot ▲

The burbot is a striking, marbled fish. It is nocturnal and hides by day. Young burbot feed on invertebrate benthic animals and fish roe. Larger burbot eat young fish. Their length ranges from 30 to 60 cm, and can even reach up to 1 metre. The species is found in clear, cold, well-oxygenated, and deep lakes. Burbot have a marked preference for fast-flowing water where they are active chiefly in the cold season. In the spawning period (November to March), the animals swim upstream in schools to deposit their extremely numerous eggs above sandy or stony bottoms. The young fish emerge from the eggs after 6 to 10 weeks and often spend their first year or two in small brooks. They reach sexual maturity in their third or fourth year.

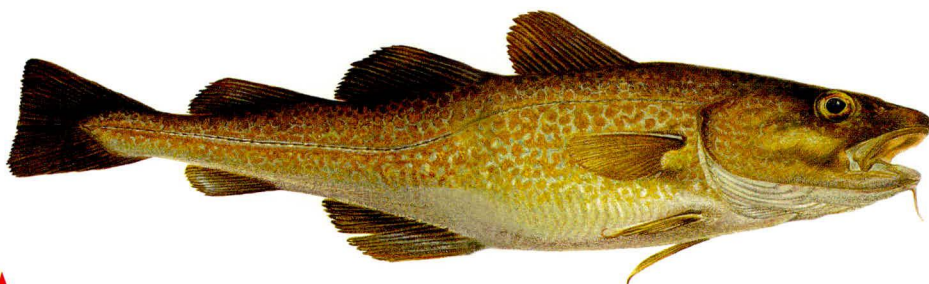
The most recent sightings in the Netherlands are from the downstream parts of the River Rhine and Meuse. Burbot are regularly caught in the Biesbosch, Volkerak/Krammer, the Waal River, the area around the Gelderse Poort and the Gelderse IJssel River. The burbot is considered a threatened species on the Dutch Red list.

carp – see common carp



chub ▲

Chub prefer deep, slow-flowing water with sufficient lees, but also exist well in still water. They spawn from the end of April to June, depositing their eggs on stones or gravel, as well as water plants. The diet of chub varies from mice, fish and frogs to aquatic plants, algae and detritus. Chub are found primarily in larger waters. In the Netherlands, chub live in the Meuse River and the smaller rivers in and to the southern part of the Dutch province of Limburg, and rarely if ever in the north and northwest Netherlands. After a decline in the 1980s, chub seem to be making a recovery. The chub is ranked as a 'near-threatened' species on the Dutch Red list.



cod ▲

Cod are found in coastal waters up to depths of 500 to 600 metres and at temperatures ranging from 2 to 10°C. They usually dwell close to the bottom, but also occur pelagically in the deep ocean. As with herring, there are cod races with various distribution, growth and spawning habits. Some undertake long spawning and feeding journeys, others create resident populations that live near the coast. Most of the populations spawn between January and April in the open water at a temperature of 4 to 6°C. The juveniles often head for coastal waters. Cod are found in the autumn and winter in Dutch estuaries (their distribution follows that of shrimp). Cod suffer from overfishing and possibly from climatic changes.



common carp ▲

Wild carp originated in Central Asia. They spread naturally to the Donau River and were then introduced into north-west Europe as early as the Middle Ages. The extent to which they maintain themselves or are artificially maintained through stocking is unclear. Carp require a high water temperature ($>15^{\circ}\text{C}$) to reproduce. Although carp often spawn in the late spring, reproduction is minimally successful at that time. They are omnivorous and find food on the substratum by turning up the bottom with their bulging mouths.

Carp is originally a species common to slow-flowing rivers and closed off distributaries. In the Netherlands carp are found in virtually all water types, mostly in larger waters, and least of all in streams.



eel ▲

Eels do not have a special preference for flowing water. A natural population requires a passageway from the sea to the inland waterways and back in order to complete its life cycle. In freshwater, eels dwell on the bottom. They are active primarily at dusk and at night; during the day they burrow in the mud, into crevices, between water plants and roots or under other objects. The species can remain alive out of water for quite some time because they switch to cutaneous respiration. Adult eels undergo a metamorphosis

(including a reduction of the intestinal canal and the development of reproductive organs) into so-called silver eels and migrate to the sea, where their spawning grounds are located probably in the Sargasso Sea, east of the Bermuda Islands. Eels die after spawning. The leptocephali, also called 'willow leaves', are carried by the Gulf Stream to the coasts of Europe within one to four years. They transform again, into elvers, before entering freshwater where their colour turns greenish-grey brown (glass eels). On average, eels reach sexual maturity after five years in freshwater.

The species is dispersed throughout the Netherlands in a wide variety of waters. Eel suffer from barriers along their migration route, damage in the turbines of hydro-electric power stations, overfishing and predation by cormorants. In October 2003 the European Commission initiated a Community Action Plan for the management of European eel. Since 1998 the species is on the Dutch Red list as a 'near-threatened' species.



flounder ▲

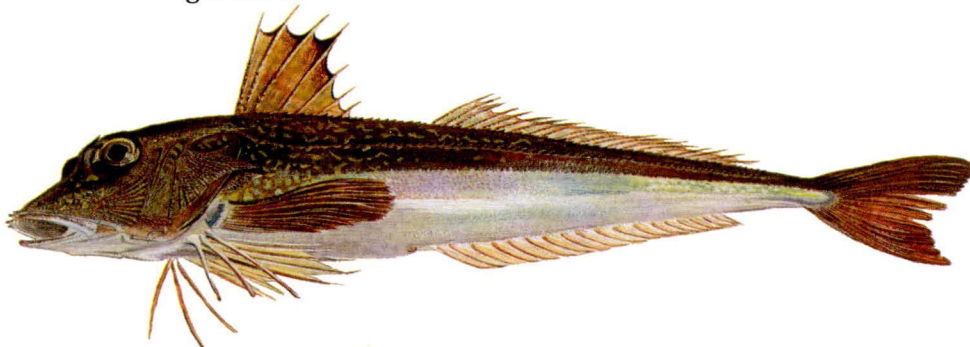
Flounder live chiefly in shallow saltwater areas and in the brackish or freshwater of estuaries. The species has no specific preference for flowing water but does require a connection between the river and the sea to complete its life cycle. It is the only flatfish occurring in the Netherlands that penetrates far into freshwater. The adults migrate in the autumn to deeper (saline) coastal waters to spawn. Young flounder initially look like 'normal' fish, but when they reach about 1 cm in length, one of the eyes begins to move to the other side of the head. They also begin to dwell on the bottom. Young flounder sometimes migrate hundreds of kilometres upstream in rivers. Like plaice, flounder are most active at night and often lie burrowed in the bottom during the day. Flounder suffer from pollution of the estuaries.



garfish ▲

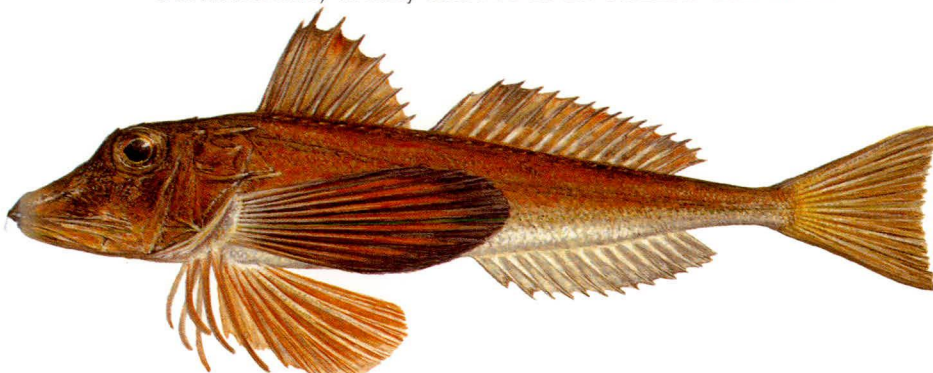
Garfish swim chiefly in schools on the surface of the sea. They hunt small fish, squid and crustaceans. A relatively high temperature in the spring is favourable for a year class, and allows them to grow very rapidly. In the spring they migrate from the Atlantic Ocean to the North Sea, where they spawn around May and June. The eggs have tendrils with which to cling to boulders and seaweed. Garfish are found along the Dutch coast primarily during the summer and autumn. They return to the waters south and west of the British Isles.

gurnard:



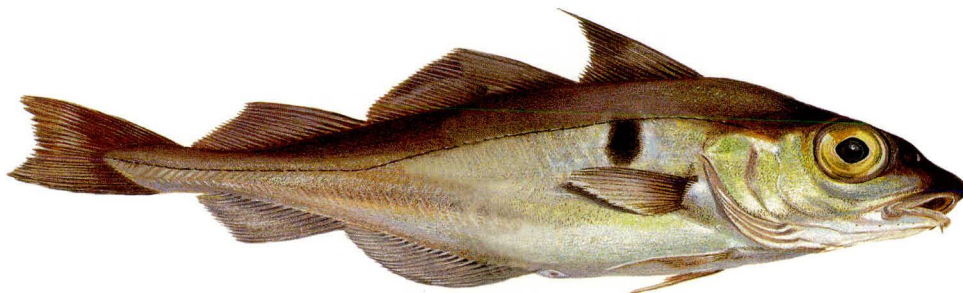
grey gurnard ▲

Grey gurnard live on soft or mixed bottoms in small schools at a depth of 10 to 150 metres. They also swim near the surface at night. Grey gurnard travel inshore in the spring and summer period to spawn from April to August in the open water. Gurnard are known for the soft grunting noise they make by using special muscles to vibrate their swimming bladder. In the Netherlands, they are found along the coast, in the Waddenzee, the Eems-Dollard and Oosterschelde, usually more so in the summer than in the winter.



tub gurnard ▲

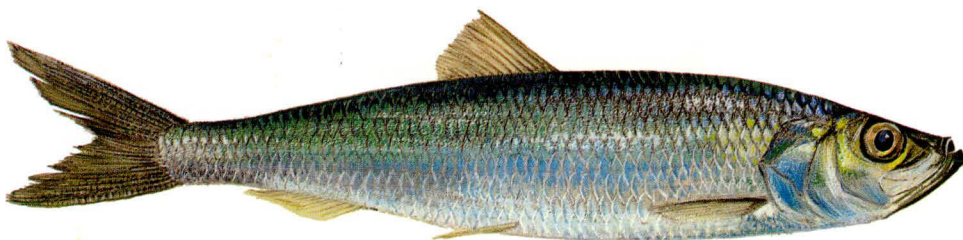
In the North Sea, tub gurnard are less common than grey gurnard. They live on sandy, mud or gravel bottoms at temperatures ranging from 8 to 24°C. They forage along the bottom using three isolated rays on either side of the pectoral fin that function as legs on which the fish rests. However, they also occur pelagically. They feed on invertebrates and fish. Tub gurnard spawn from May to October at depths of 20 to 150 metres. They are fairly common along the Dutch coasts, chiefly in the summer, but they also occur in estuaries.



haddock ▲

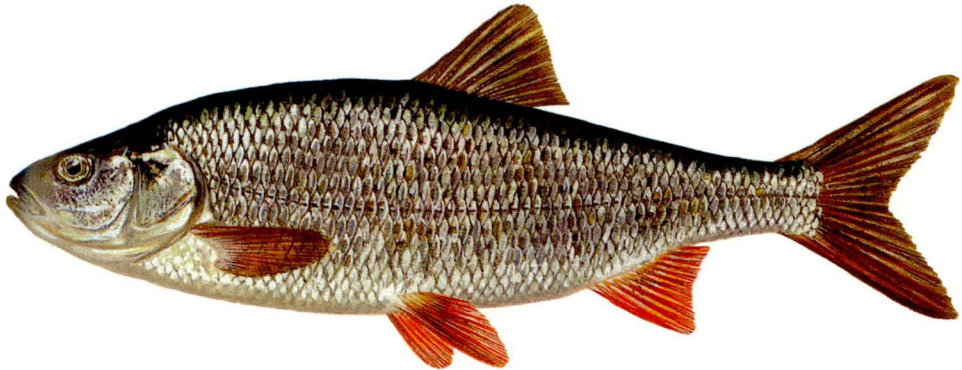
Haddock dwell near the bottom at a depth of 10 to 200 metres. In the winter, the sexually mature animals migrate to the spawning grounds in the northern North Sea. They spawn in March to June at a temperature of 5 to 7°C and at a depth of 50 to 70 metres. The females lay transparent pelagic eggs that float to the surface. The 5 mm long larvae emerge after one to three weeks. These are widely dispersed by ocean currents. When they reach a length of 5 to 10 cm they go to the bottom, usually in relatively deep water. In the North Sea they become sexually mature at the age of three to four years at a length of 30 to 40 cm. Haddock mostly feed on benthic animals such as shellfish and worms.

Haddock are caught with trawlers and long lines, and sold fresh or as frozen fillets on the market.



herring ◀

Herring are pelagic fish that run in schools and are found up to 200 metres deep. They remain in deep water during the day, but follow prey up to the surface at night. The species can be divided into various populations or races differing in size, growth rate, spawning time and migration routes. There are autumn, winter and spring spawners. Most races migrate, releasing their eggs freely in the water in the transitional zone between the coastal waters and the warmer saline deep water off the coastal shelf. They spawn above gravel beds and on bottoms with seaweed. The larvae drift with the current and sometimes even reach Zeeland waters and the North Sea Canal. Herring are also found in the Eems-Dollard region and in the Waddenzee. Recently, many mature specimens have been found in the brackish Veerse Meer. Herring suffer from overfishing and the growing gravel extraction in the North Sea.



ide ▲

Ide live in flowing rivers and in lakes. For a self-sustaining population, a connection with rivers is essential since ide migrate upstream to the smaller rivers and streams in the spawning season. Ide spawn from March to May in shallow areas above gravel or sand bottoms, or (material of) water plants, in a current of 5 to 40 cm/s. Although ide usually stay near the surface and catch all kinds of tiny vertebrates, they also feed on fish and vegetable matter.

In the Netherlands, ide are found mostly in the major rivers, primarily the Merwede, and Haringvliet, the Hollandsch Diep, the IJssel, and other large bodies of water such as the Ketelmeer, IJsselmeer, Markermeer and Amsterdam-Rhine Canal. In closed waters, they are often stocked for angling purposes. Ide suffer from pollution and the construction of sluices and dams. The ide is classified as a near-threatened species on the Dutch Red list.



lampern ▲

Lampern are born in freshwater. They spawn in groups above gravel banks (in pre-excavated pits) in shallow, fast-flowing water (100-200 cm/s). Reproduction takes place in the spring (March to May), when the water temperature rises to about 10°C. The adults die after reproducing. The ammocoete larvae remain buried in the bottom in the flowing freshwater for about four and a half years. Sometimes they allow themselves to be carried along by the current and settle again in the bottom elsewhere. Then the metamorphosis into adult animals is completed (including the development of the eyes and the intestinal canal) and they migrate out to sea, where they parasitise species of fish such as herring, sprat, cod, etc. The fish reach sexual maturity after one to two years and undergo a second (minor) transformation (a reduction of the intestinal canal, growth of the fins, the development of sexual organs). Following this change, lampern are no longer able to feed and the migratory journey then commences upstream in the rivers.

In the Netherlands, lampern are found in small numbers in the major rivers and in the IJsselmeer, as well as in brooks in Limburg and in any case the Ruhr River. Lampern are registered on the Red List as 'vulnerable'. The species suffers from degradation of the water quality, silting up, and barriers along the migration route.

lamprey:



european brook lamprey ▲

In contrast to lampern and lamprey, the European brook lamprey is not a migratory fish. It is a sedentary freshwater fish found in well-oxygenated streams. European brook lamprey live as larvae (the ammocoete larva) for their first three to six years, after which they undergo a transformation (the development of eyes and gonads, the closing of the intestine), but do not develop into parasites like lampern and lamprey. Adult European brook lamprey then live for another six months – without eating – in order to be able to spawn, after which they die.

In the Netherlands, several sightings of European brook lamprey have been made in East Brabant, the eastern part of the Veluwe, and Achterhoek regions and in a few streams in Limburg east of the Meuse River. The range of distribution of the European brook lamprey has diminished throughout Europe. Stream regulations, damming, significant differences in the water level, and acidification constitute the primary threats to the European brook lamprey. It is considered a near-threatened species on the IUCN Red List, and a threatened species on the Dutch Red List.



lamprey ▲

Lamprey are born in freshwater and live there for around six to eight years as ammocoete larvae before migrating to the sea. There they continue to grow, living as fish parasites of larger fish, returning to freshwater after three or four years to reproduce. Their intestinal canal is reduced during migration. Lamprey spawn in small groups above gravel banks with a rapid current (100 to 200 cm/s). Lamprey have been sighted in the Netherlands primarily in the IJsselmeer and in large rivers and lakes. Since the 1990s, lamprey appear to have been increasing in Dutch waters, in the IJsselmeer, among others. The species suffers from the regulation of rivers (the construction of dams) and water pollution. The lamprey is classified as a 'threatened' species on the Dutch Red list and the IUCN Red list.



longspined sea scorpion ▲

Longspined sea-scorpions are closely related to bull rout. They reproduce in the early spring and prefer to lay their eggs on seaweed. They are fairly commonly found between stones and seaweed along the Dutch coast and

in Zeeland waters, in shallow water up to a depth of several dozen metres, primarily near piers and dikes. Longspined sea scorpions can breathe air when out of the water.



lump sucker ▲

Lumpsuckers live on rocky bottoms at depths of 20 to 200 metres, although they are sometimes found amidst drifting seaweed. The species spawns in the early spring on the bottom in shallow coastal water, after which the brood is guarded by the male. The young fish spend the summer in the seaweed zone and are firmly attached to the seaweed. Adult lumpsuckers feed mostly on krill and small jellyfish. The (dyed black) eggs of the lump-sucker are sometimes used to make inexpensive 'lumpfish caviar'. Lump-suckers are found in the North Sea and in the Dutch estuaries, except for the Westerschelde.



northern pike ▲

Northern pike live in still or slow-flowing water. They spawn in the spring in shallow water, preferably above flooded grassland or in riverbank zones with reeds and underwater plants. In their early life stages, Northern pike hide from predators (often their own species) in densely vegetated riverbank zones, while older specimens that are too big to serve as prey can seem incautious.

In the Netherlands, Northern pike live in all kinds of waters, except the IJsselmeer. They never occur in great densities because they regulate their own existence in the above-described fashion. Since Northern pike hunt by sight, they are sensitive to a decrease in the clarity of the water. In addition, they suffer from the loss of suitable spawning places and the disappearance of water plants.



perch ▲

Perch are found throughout the Netherlands in both flowing and still waters that are preferably clear with a hard bottom. Adult fish prefer deeper, larger bodies of water. Perch spawn in the early spring in shallow water above water plants, tree roots, dead branches or stones and deposit the eggs in broad ribbons several eggs wide. Young perch generally feed on invertebrates and begin to eat fish when they are more than 11 centimetres long. Large specimen perch are more likely to be found in deep, nutrient poor water. In less favourable circumstances, their growth can stagnate entirely – ‘stunted growth’.

pike – see northern pike

plaice ▼

Plaice spawn in the winter and in the early spring (somewhat later in brackish water) at a temperature of about 6°C in the North Sea or in the English Channel. The eggs and larvae float from the sea to the tidal waters (Waddenzee, Eems-Dollard and Zeeland waters), where the larvae and juveniles mature. After one to two months the young fish are 10 mm long and begin to transform: the left eye moves over the head and the fish begin to swim on their left side. Subsequently, they lead a benthic life. They are chiefly



active at night in shallow water. During the day they often lie buried in the sand. Shellfish are plaice's primary food. After two years, when ready to spawn, plaice migrate again to the North Sea.



powan ▲

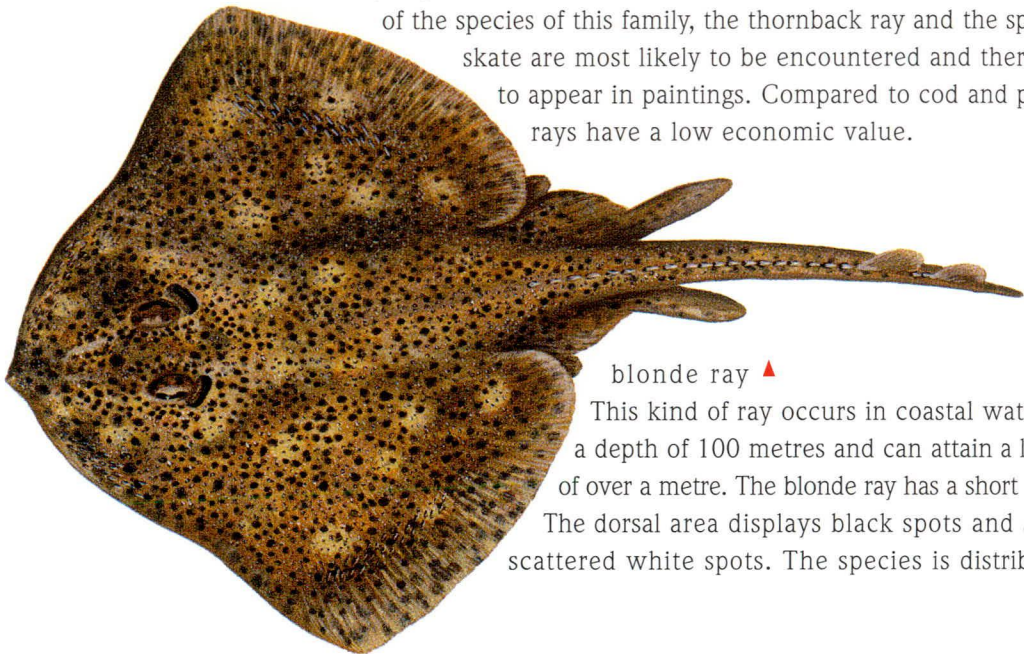
The taxonomy of the *coregoninae* is among the most complicated of all European freshwater fish genres. With respect to powan, houting, vendace and a few others, one often speaks of a species complex; the *Coregonus lavaretus* complex. In the literature, powan and houting are often dealt with as a single species (houting is considered a sub-species of powan, namely *Coregonus lavaretus oxyrinchus*). Nevertheless, they are often treated as independent species.

There are both migratory forms as well as resident populations of powan and all of the other *coregoninae*. Powan are pelagic shoaling fish found in the deep and cold lakes in the Alps, Siberia and along the coast of the Baltic Sea. They suffer from deoxygenation of the lower layers of lakes due to eutrophication. They let their eggs sink to the bottom and should this

environment have no oxygen saturation, reproduction cannot take place. Most migratory *coregoninae* populations became extinct because they were deprived of the possibility of migrating to sea. The present resident fish populations remain in the Alpine lakes and in the upstream section of the Rhine River. In the Netherlands, large powan have been caught in increasing numbers since the beginning of the 1980s, chiefly in the tidal river area, the IJsselmeer and at times upstream of the major rivers. They might be carried there with floodwater from the Alpine countries. It is uncertain whether powan are native to the Netherlands. They suffer from eutrophication and the water becoming turbid.

rays

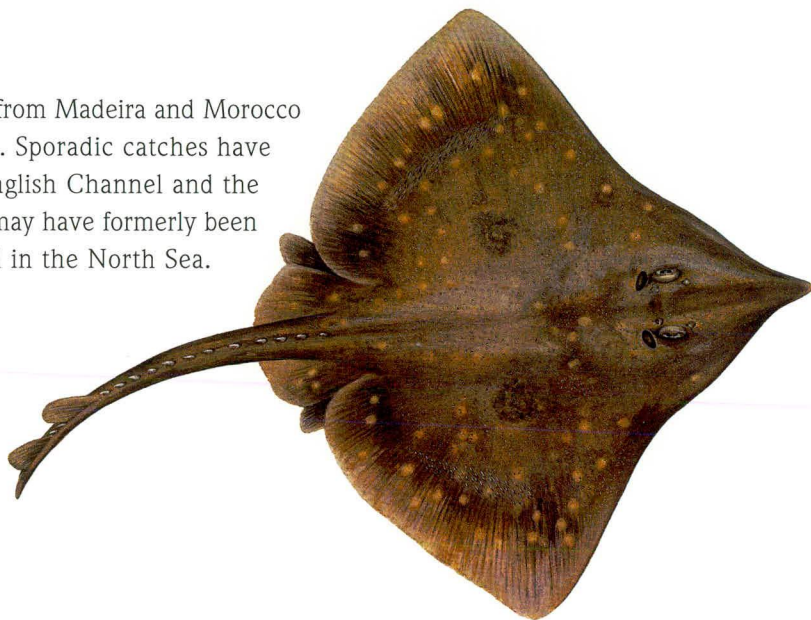
Rays have a square, diamond-shaped body with a more or less pointy snout. The back is dark and armed with large spines, while the underside is white. The males are usually smaller than the females and can be recognised by their specially adapted ventral fins (called 'graspers') that are used as a reproductive organ. Rays live on sandy bottoms and eat benthic organisms such as crabs and starfish. They are active at night, and locate their prey through olfactory and sensory organs and electro-receptors. True rays (family *Rajidae*) lay eggs; the fertilised eggs are contained in an oblong capsule. The rays in the paintings are often difficult to identify because the specimens are mostly depicted from the ventral side. Given the distribution pattern of the species of this family, the thornback ray and the spotted skate are most likely to be encountered and therefore to appear in paintings. Compared to cod and plaice, rays have a low economic value.



blonde ray ▲

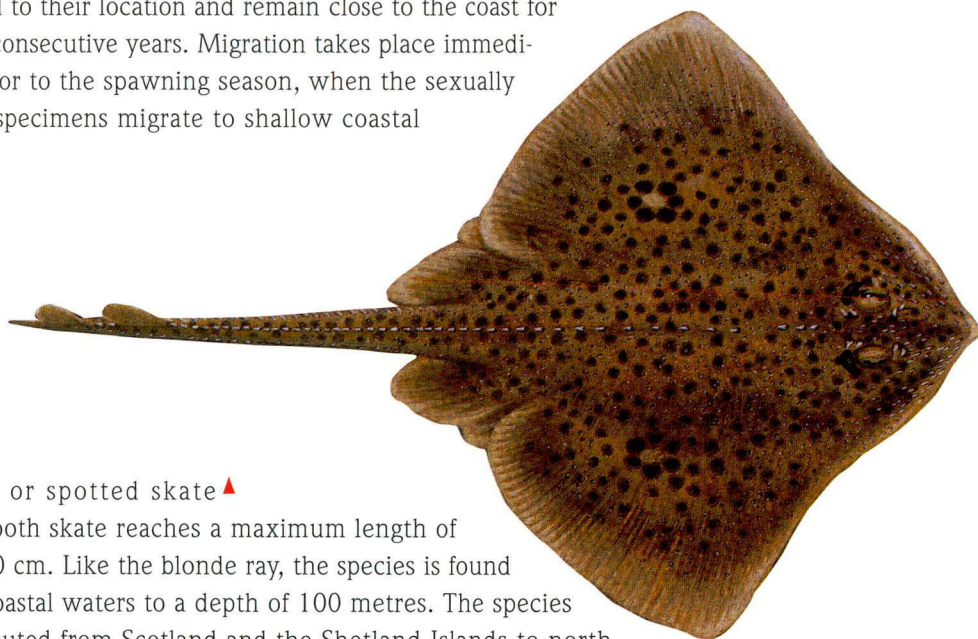
This kind of ray occurs in coastal waters to a depth of 100 metres and can attain a length of over a metre. The blonde ray has a short snout. The dorsal area displays black spots and some scattered white spots. The species is distributed

along the Atlantic coast from Madeira and Morocco to the south of Scotland. Sporadic catches have been reported in the English Channel and the North Sea. The species may have formerly been more widely distributed in the North Sea.



thornback ray ▲

This ray, also called roker, too reaches a maximum length of more than a metre. The back is yellow-brown with dark-brown spots and is densely set with spines. Presently, this is the most common species of ray in northwest Europe. Young rays appear to be strongly bound to their location and remain close to the coast for several consecutive years. Migration takes place immediately prior to the spawning season, when the sexually mature specimens migrate to shallow coastal waters.



smooth or spotted skate ▲

The smooth skate reaches a maximum length of about 70 cm. Like the blonde ray, the species is found in the coastal waters to a depth of 100 metres. The species is distributed from Scotland and the Shetland Islands to northwest Africa and the western Mediterranean.



roach ▲

Roach are a very common kind of shoaling fish, found primarily along the vegetated banks of still or slow flowing waters (mild current areas of rivers). They prefer the somewhat deeper water layers. Roach are generalists, adapting well to other types of waters in the Netherlands where they may be found in large numbers. They spawn from the end of April through May in shallow water, and prefer to deposit their eggs on water plants. However, should these not be present, the eggs are also deposited on other structures. The fish eat invertebrates, vegetable matter and detritus.

Roach showed signs of decreasing in a number of Dutch waters in the second half of the twentieth century, possibly due to the advance of bream with which they may compete.

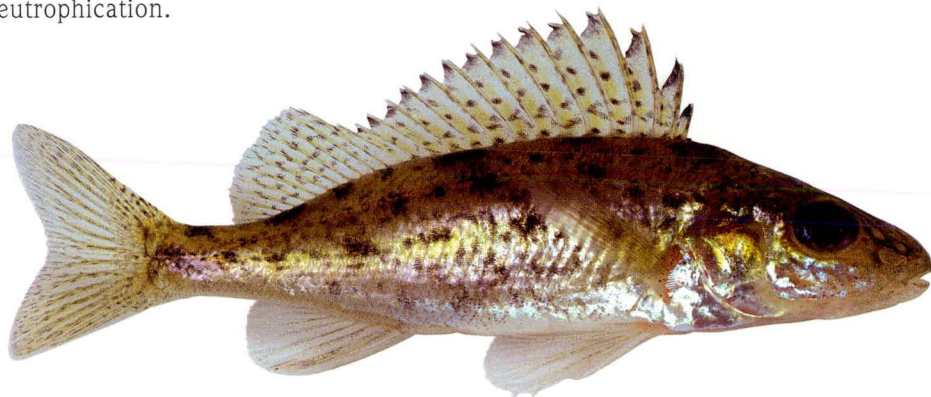
roker – see thornback ray



rudd ▲

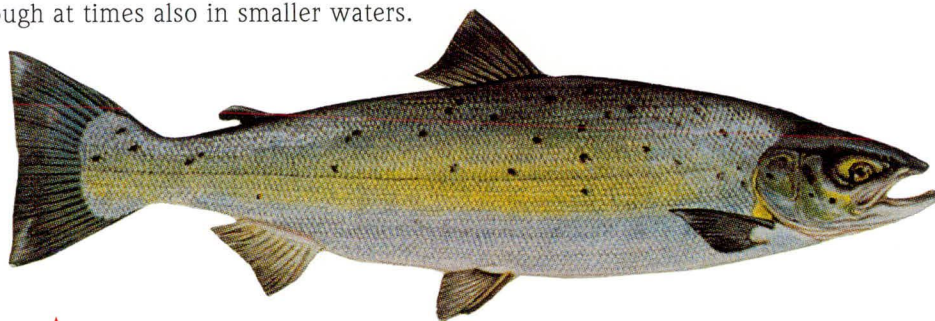
Rudd are found in clear, still or slow-flowing, not too deep water, with abundant riverbank vegetation and underwater plants. They swim just under the surface and feed on small animals, such as insects and snails, as well as plants. The eggs are deposited in shallow water on water plants from

May to June. In the Netherlands, rudd live in almost all types of water, but not as abundantly as roach, to which they are closely related. Rudd are particularly sensitive to water pollution, the removal of water vegetation, and eutrophication.



rudd ▲

Ruff belong to the perch family. They are primarily benthic fish, feeding on the bottom. They inhabit large bodies of water. In brackish water rich in food, they can grow particularly rapidly and may reach 30 cm in length. Ruff spawn between March and May in places with a gravel bottom, sometimes near water plants. They vanish when the bottom becomes covered with a layer of mud, or when stratification arises and the lowest layers of the water become deoxygenated. In the Netherlands, they are mostly found in larger bodies of water, such as the IJsselmeer, lakes and major rivers, although at times also in smaller waters.

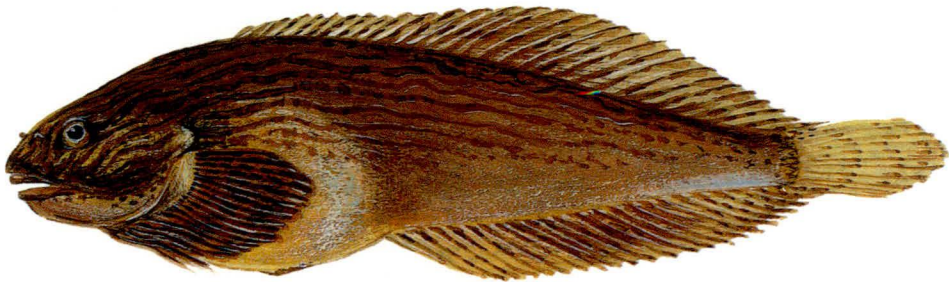


salmon ▲

While at sea, salmon swim long distances between the West European coasts and those of the eastern United States. To reproduce, salmon swim up their natal rivers until they reach the headwaters. The spawning migration lasts from June to November. Once in freshwater, salmon virtually stop eating. During migration, their lipid reserves are depleted for the sake of the jour-

ney and the production of gonadal secretions. In the winter salmon eggs are laid in shallow, cold ($<14^{\circ}\text{C}$) and well-oxygenated water at a depth of one-half to three metres. Most of the adult animals die after spawning, but a significant number return to the sea as kelts and may return to spawn again. The young salmon or parr live in freshwater from one to six years before migrating back to the sea. Their growth rate is slow in freshwater, and faster out at sea.

The historic salmon population (Rijnzalm) has vanished from the Dutch rivers since the Second World War, but since the 1990s an increasing number of salmon have been caught in large rivers and in the IJsselmeer, due to restauration programmes introducing the species by stocking larvae from Scotland or Scandinavia. Recovery of the population is hampered by obstructions in their migration route, the destruction of their spawning habitat, canalisation of the rivers, overfishing (both at sea and in the rivers), water pollution and high water temperatures. The species is found on the Dutch Red List of fish.

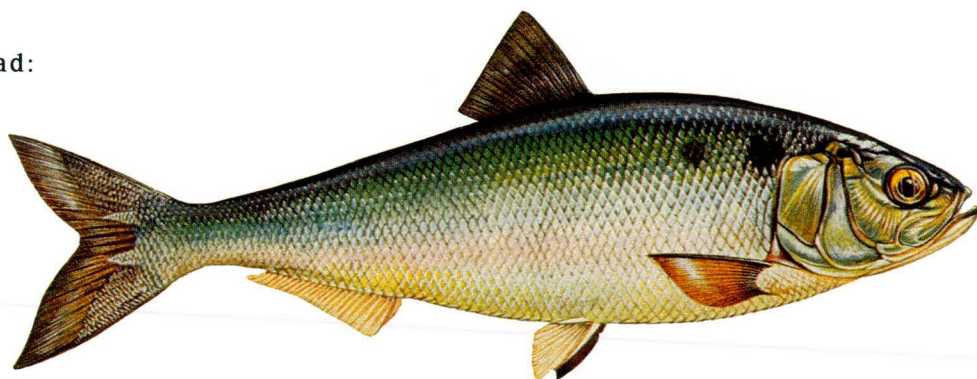


sea snail ▲

Sea snails are bottom-dwelling fish with a preference for soft ground. They live in the seaweed zone at depths of 1 to 300 metres. They weather the turbulent water along the coast by attaching themselves firmly to rocks by means of suction discs. They feed mainly on crustaceans, and sometimes fish or worms. In the winter, the eggs are deposited outside of the tidal zone on the sea floor or on seaweed. Sea snails are not common in the Netherlands, but can sometimes be found in fairly large numbers in the Zeeland waters during their annual migration, as well as in the Waddenzee.

sea trout – see trout

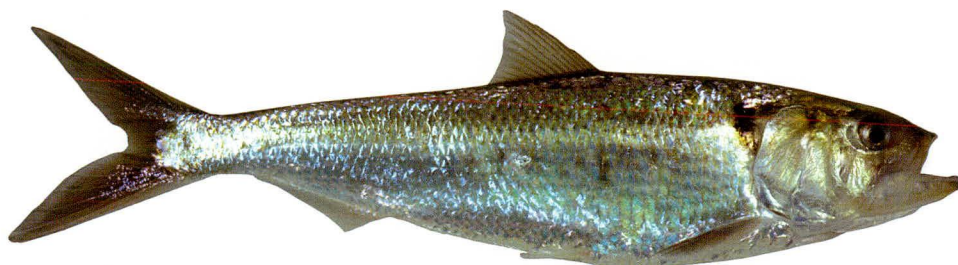
shad:



allis shad ▲

Allis shad are pelagic fish that migrate into the rivers in the spring to spawn. Formerly, they migrated up the Rhine River, among others, to Basel and to the Neckar, Main and Moselle Rivers to spawn above gravel beds (allis shad have never spawned in the Netherlands). Eggs, larvae, and young fish gradually glide down the river and mature in freshwater tidal areas. When the fish reach approximately 12 centimetres in length, they migrate to the sea.

The historic population in the Meuse and Rhine Rivers has vanished. Since the end of the nineteenth century allis shad have decreased greatly due to overfishing. Damming up, water pollution and gravel extraction have also played a role, as has possibly cross-breeding with twaite shad. Since 1970 only a few catches of allis shad have been reported, most of which were during the late 1990s. The IUCN Red List ranks the species in the category 'data deficient'. The Dutch Red List considers the species as 'disappeared'.



twaite shad ▲

Like allis shad, twaite shad are migratory fish but do not migrate as far upriver. Shad, like salmon, stop eating when they enter freshwater. Twaite shad spawn above gravel beds, in places where the tide is still felt. Males probably never leave their estuary upstream. The reproductive success is linked to a high spawning temperature (18-22°C). Young fish can only survive thanks to the tide. At low tide the larvae seek the bottom, and at high tide, when

the river current is decelerated, they forage higher in the water column. Twaite shad return to the sea after spawning.

In the Netherlands, twaite shad are occasionally spotted in the area around the Nieuwe Waterweg, Haringvliet, in the North Sea Canal and in the IJsselmeer at the Afsluitdijk. Twaite shad suffer from the construction of dams, weirs and barrages which disrupt the tidal flow. The twaite shad is as 'disappeared species' on the Dutch Red list.

silver bream – see bream

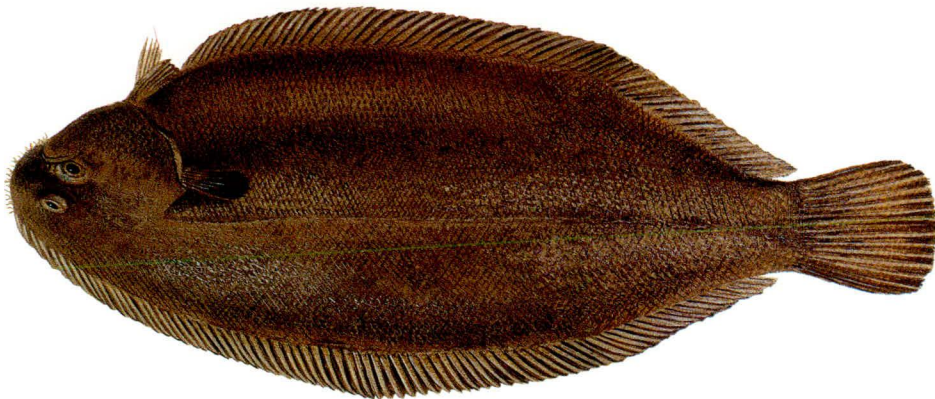
skate – see rays



smelt ▲

There are two forms of smelt. Anadromous smelt migrate between saltwater and freshwater. However, there are also resident populations, that spend their entire life cycle in freshwater. These specimens are not as large as the migratory smelt. Smelt spawn early in the spring in deep or shallow water above a hard substratum in a current of 30 to 200 cm/s. The spawning substratum of choice consists of stones, sand, gravel or water vegetation. The eggs attach themselves to the substratum.

The species occur in the Netherlands primarily in the north and the west of the country, particularly in the Waddenzee and tidal inlets, the IJsselmeer and other large lakes, and rivers. Smelt suffer from the pollution of coastal waters.



sole ▲

Sole prefer soft, muddy or sandy bottoms to a depth of 150 metres. The species spawn in the southern North Sea between April and June in shallower water (20 to 50 metres) at a temperature of 6 to 12°C. Sole forage at night with the help of tactile sense organs and feed on worms, molluscs and crustaceans. In the winter they live in deeper water and do not eat. During migration to the spawning grounds, they often swim pelagically at night with the surface currents, rather than along the bottom.

Sole are generally found along the Dutch coast and also penetrate the inland waterways, including the North Sea Canal region. The Waddenzee is known to be a breeding ground for sole. The fish also occur in the Eems-Dollard region and the Westerschelde.



sprat ▲

Sprat, like herring, are pelagic shoaling fish found in brackish estuaries and in the sea along the coast. They live at a depth of 5 to 150 metres, deeper in the winter than in the summer, and deeper during the day than at night. Sprat spawn between January and July at depths of 10 to 20 metres. They generally live along the Dutch coast, in estuaries, the North Sea Canal and the IJ. Sprat suffer from overfishing in the North Sea.



sturgeon ▲

Sturgeons spend most of their life at sea, but migrate to rivers in order to reproduce in the spring or summer. The females reach sexual maturity after about 15 years. They spawn at a depth of at least three metres in a powerful current in deep basins in the gravel beds of rivers. Young sturgeon drift downstream, arriving in the estuary's brackish water after a few months. There they remain, in fairly shallow areas with sandbanks that offer hiding

places. From the estuary they regularly swim from freshwater to brackish water and saltwater, and back. They head out to sea after about two years.

The sturgeon population declined greatly in the Dutch rivers in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century. It is likely that the natural habitat of the species had already been degraded as a result of human intervention in the landscape of the rivers and estuaries (gravel extraction, damming, harbour construction and navigation). Overfishing is probably one of the chief reasons for the extinction of sturgeon in the Netherlands. An additional factor is the length of time it takes the female fish to reach sexual maturity. Now, when a sturgeon is caught in the inland waterways it is often a specimen of a cultivated sturgeon species (sterlet, Siberian and Russian sturgeon), that has escaped or has been deliberately introduced.

Sturgeon are registered on the IUCN Red List as 'critically endangered'. The species is also found on the Dutch Red List of fish.



tench ▲

Tench live in waters with dense vegetation and a soft bottom. A gentle current is permissible, but tench become uncomfortable in medium or even stronger flowing water. A hard sandy or stony bottom, turbid water or great depths are also less suitable for this species. Tench can withstand high water temperatures, and are most comfortable around 24°C. They can survive periods of oxygen deprivation by going into a kind of coma, just like the crucian carp. They are timid fish that hide among water plants during the day and become active only at dusk, foraging along the bottom with their short feelers. Tench spawn around the end of May at temperatures above

18°C. The eggs are deposited on water plants and both the eggs and the larvae cannot survive without the protection of water plants. In the Netherlands, tench are found in virtually all types of water, except in the IJsselmeer.

thornback ray – see rays

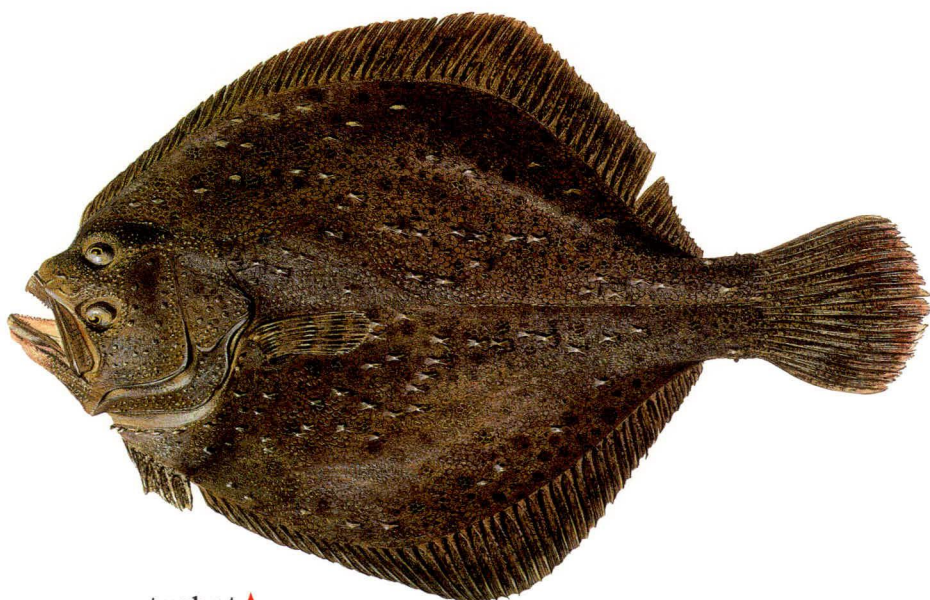


trout ▲

While two kinds of trout are found naturally in Dutch waters – brown trout and sea trout – they are, in fact, all the same species, *Salmo trutta*. Like other salmonoids (such as salmon), trout have a flexible life history, in which two strategies can occur at the same time. Within a single population of trout there are both individuals that migrate to the sea (sea trout) and others that remain permanently in the river system (brown trout). Whether an individual migrates to the sea is probably determined by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. Sea trout do not migrate as far into the ocean as salmon, staying closer to the coast.

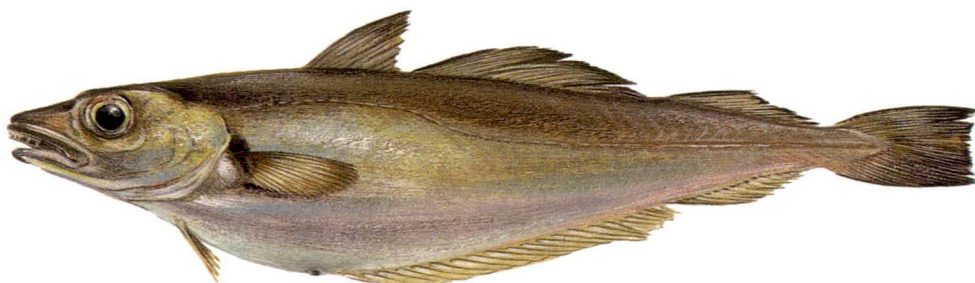
In freshwater, trout live in cool, clean, rapidly flowing brooks. The water must be well oxygenated and clear, given that trout hunt by sight. The species lives around dams, dikes and watermills. The fish seek shelter behind boulders, piers and (dead) wood, in channels between plant beds, under hollow riverbanks and overhanging branches and in deep (current) basins. When it is time to spawn, the trout that do not swim to sea make a short migration to the upper reaches or tributaries of their river to spawn in gravel beds in shallow water.

Following a decline in the mid-twentieth century, sea trout have made some recovery recently in the Netherlands, especially in the larger rivers and in the Markermeer and IJsselmeer. Brown trout are more often found in small rivers and streams, such as in the Limburg brooks, or in places where they are stocked such as the Veerse Meer. Trout are sensitive to pollution and the regulation of rivers, barriers in the migration route.



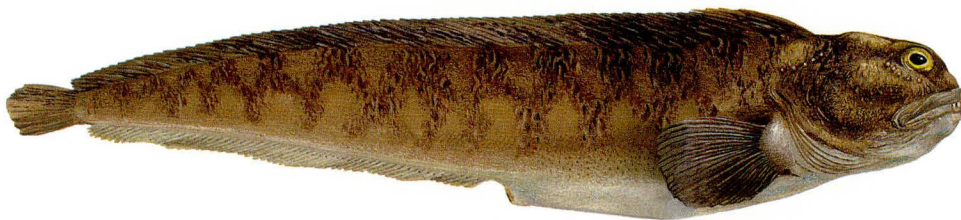
turbot ▲

Turbot dwell on a sandy, rocky or mixed bottom at a depth of 20 to 70 metres. They feed mostly on benthic fish, along with crustaceans and molluscs. They mostly spawn between April and August. Like other flatfish, the larvae are still zygomorphic and pelagic before the metamorphosis into real flatfish takes place. The larvae are found in shallow coastal waters and in brackish waters. Turbot live all along the Dutch coast.



whiting ▲

Whiting are usually encountered at a depth of 30 to 100 metres, above mud and gravel bottoms, but also on sand and rock. Whiting spawn in the spring, the larvae often associate with jellyfish, probably for protection. After their first year of life whiting migrate to the open sea. As they become bigger, they begin to lead a benthic life. They are active predators that hunt fish, shrimp and crabs. Whiting are generally found along the Dutch coast, and the Waddenzee is a breeding ground for the species.



wolf-fish ▲

Wolf-fish dwell on stony or rocky bottoms. They reach sexual maturity at the age of six or seven years, at a length of 50 to 60 cm and a weight of 1 to 3 kilos. They feed largely on benthic animals (crabs, hard-shelled molluscs and sea-urchins), which they crack open with their powerful teeth. The worn teeth are replaced with new ones shortly before the spawning season. The spawning period is from October to January. The species is rare along the Dutch coast. Wolf-fish represent an important secondary catch in trawls and long lines. They are skinned and the frightening head is removed before sale.

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CATALOGUE OF PAINTINGS

Fred G. Meijer and Eddy de Jongh

SOUTHERN NETHERLANDS
ANTWERP



1 Joachim Beuckelaer (c. 1533-1575)

A fish market 1570

Oil on canvas, 152 x 225 cm. Signed indistinctly right of centre: 'Joa[...]be[...]'; dated upper right: 1570

Naples, Museo di Capodimonte, inv. no. Q 163

¹ P. Verbraeken in Ghent 1986-1987, p. 126, under cat. no. 9.

² Some of these motifs also recur in other works. See the references in Ghent 1986-1987, under cat. no. 9.

³ Margreet Wolters is currently writing a dissertation on Beuckelaer's technique and working method.

After Pieter Aertsen took the first tentative step on the road to what would become the individual fish still life, his nephew, Joachim Beuckelaer, began to definitively pave the way to this genre in the form of his impressive fish markets. Beuckelaer's markets with fish from 1569 and 1570 in London and Stockholm respectively, are among his most successful contributions to this field.

In recent literature it has been suggested that the painting from Naples can no longer be accepted as a work by Beuckelaer himself.¹ Although when compared, for example, with the London fish market – Beuckelaer's earliest depiction of this subject in which fish have been assigned such a prominent role – some minor weaknesses may be discerned in the Naples work, on the whole it displays many of the artist's idiosyncrasies in the modelling and rendering of motifs and in the handling of the paint. Numerous details, particularly of the fish in the right half of the painting, are inimitably autograph.

Beuckelaer clearly derived as much pleasure from painting fish as from portraying the numerous other foodstuffs in his markets and kitchen scenes. His delight in manipulating the paint is manifest in the depiction

of the wet and glistening scales, the open mouths and wide-eyed gaze, and the soft, pink or pearly flesh. Even though the role of the figures are still more important than the still-life elements in Beuckelaer's paintings, the fish nevertheless attract ample attention.

At first glance, Beuckelaer's market paintings seem to be simple images of daily life; however, entirely in keeping with tradition he often included a biblical scene in the background. In most of the views of fish markets it is generally the Miraculous draft of fishes (John 21:4-8). The same scene is included in the painting under discussion, albeit much reduced in size, under the arch to the right.

To aid him in his composition, and for purposes of anatomical accuracy, Beuckelaer prepared studies of individual fish, and then transferred these motifs to his painting surface. Such models could be used more than once and thus, the same fish sometimes recur in several of his works.² The pike, the slices of salmon and the thornback ray, for instance, are found in the painting in London, dated one year earlier. Unfortunately, not one of Beuckelaer's studies has survived since they were rather temporary in nature and not intended to be handed down.³ FGM



2 Frans Snijders (1579-1657)

A fish seller at his stall on the Antwerp quay c. 1620

Oil on canvas, 171.4 x 143.4 cm

Antwerp, KBC Bank & Verzekering, Rockoxhuis, inv. no. 77.148

¹ As Hella Robels argued (Robels 1989, cat. no. 31, p. 196), the painting was quite likely reduced from a far larger horizontal format at some point in time.

² Robels 1989 also referred to De Gheijn's print and illustrated it (p. 196). Her suggestion that the model for Snijders' fishmonger may have been the same as Rubens' for his *St Christopher* in the Antwerp Cathedral strikes me as somewhat far-fetched.

³ Koslow 1999, p. 142 and note 199. The author goes so far as to suggest that the painting may even have been painted for the Abbey. Although the association with Christ as a fisher of souls in connection with a fish piece could of course be legitimate, it is my impression that Koslow's interpretation of the scales here is too speculative.

Frans Snijders' virtuosity is abundantly apparent in this painting, not in the least because we are drawn so close to the life-size subject.¹ The writhing of the fish being poured out by the fishmonger is particularly impressive: Snijders' suggestion of motion is entirely convincing. We expect the eel at the front left to slide into the pail of carp at any moment while simultaneously wondering whether the sprawling bull rout will end up in the wooden tub, or on the floor. Much is happening at the same time: a lamprey is crawling out from between a large cod and an enormous sturgeon on the table, and a cat – its eyes gleaming in the dark space under the table – is stealing a carp from the brass pail on the floor.

Snijders' fluid, masterful handling of the paint is apparent in the modelling of the various fish in slick layers, built up from dark to light, suggesting weight, shape and texture. His manipulation of colour is also highly refined, the various patches of red tints echoing each other in the balance of silvery whites and shades of brown and yellow.

The image suggests bounty and in this respect can be connected with a print by Jacques (II) de Gheijn of a fisherman pouring fish out of

a basket into a small tub. The print refers to the abundance of the fruits of the sea while admonishing moderation, a message that Snijders may also have intended, but which is lost in the luxury of the image.²

The tower in the background could be the Bakkerstoren on the Antwerp quay, near the fish market. Nevertheless, this is in no way a faithful depiction of an actual stall on the Antwerp market, where sea fish were sold indoors at the 'Binnenvismarkt', and freshwater fish outdoors at the 'Buitenvismarkt'. And of course the plentiful supply Snijders conjures up for us is far from realistic, even though all of these fish and other sea creatures will have been available from time to time.

The spire in the background has been identified as that of St Michael's Abbey and the scales hanging almost in front of it have been connected to that in depictions of the Last Judgment, which would lend the painting a highly religious tenor.³ However, given De Gheijn's print, perhaps we should be satisfied in connecting the scales with the notion of moderation, should we wish to see them as more than simply a practical tool used by the fishmonger. FGM



3 Frans Snijders (1579-1657) (attributed to)

Still life with fish, an otter and a lobster c. 1610

Oil on panel, 97 x 126 cm

Delft, Stedelijk Museum Het Prinsenhof (permanent loan from the Instituut Collectie Nederland, Rijswijk, inv. no. NK 1980)

¹ A replica of a lesser quality appeared in a sale in Paris (Hôtel George V), 9 April 1990, lot 56, colour ill., as attributed to Jacques van de Kerckhove. Hella Robels did not include the painting on view in her monograph and oeuvre catalogue of Snijders (Robels 1989). A free copy, probably made substantially later, was in a private collection in Rotterdam (photo at RKD).

² Oil on canvas, 88.5 x 120 cm, Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, inv. no. WRM 2137, Robels 1989, no. 7.

³ Oil on canvas, 134 x 204 cm, Moscow, Pushkin Museum, inv. no. 650, Robels 1989, no. 11, ill. in colour in Koslow 1999, pp. 140 (detail) and 141. Both authors date the painting to c. 1613-1614.

As a painter of fish, Frans Snijders is best known for his fish markets (see cat. no. 2 and fig. 3, p. 21), but he also painted a few indoor still lifes of fish on a tabletop. Since the painting shown here has some weaknesses – the execution of the otter and some of the fish is not entirely up to the quality we expect from a major master like Snijders – one wonders if it is entirely autograph. There can be little doubt, however, that Snijders was responsible for the composition and we may assume that he painted at least one version of it himself. In any case, the painting under discussion is the best in quality of the extant versions of this composition.¹ It does not evidence the slick and fluid character of the fish that we see in the market pieces, however, which appears to be only partly due to the painting's execution. Most likely this painting – or its unrecorded prototype – was made earlier than the fish markets. This would seem to be confirmed by the fact that the motif of the lobster on top of a cauldron also features in a kitchen piece by Snijders in Cologne that can be dated to around 1610.² In contrast, the fish in a *Fish stall* in Moscow already resemble those in the market pieces in style and composition.³ But, in the latter picture, too, the fish are displayed on a table placed at an angle to the picture plane, and it includes

a barrel of oysters similar to the one in the exhibited painting. On the whole, this combination of differences and similarities suggest dating the present composition to 1610 or slightly later. As such it is more or less contemporary with Clara Peeters' fish piece of 1611 (cat. no. 5). However, both works differ substantially in character. Peeters draws close to her subject, which she renders in refined detail, while Snijders favours the broad gesture both in terms of facture and the lavish choice of items he included in his composition. His freshwater fish and sea fish (whole and sliced), the fruit, vegetables, crab and oysters appear to have been brought into this wealthy kitchen fresh from the market and were randomly scattered on the table. Only the lobster has already been cooked, resulting in its red colour which conveniently provides a strong accent in the composition.

The prominently displayed dead otter is an unusual motif. The animal is a keen fisher, and may have been included here for that reason. Similarly, an otter recurs lying on a pail of oysters in Snijders' *Fish market* in St Petersburg. In daily life, though, an otter was not likely to end up on a kitchen counter. Otters were hunted not for their flesh, but rather for their luxurious fur. **FGM**



4 Unknown artist after Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678) and Frans Snijders (1579-1657)

Allegory of the catch c. 1650

Canvas, 73 x 90 cm

Coburg, Schloss Ehrenburg, Gemäldegalerie

¹ Miedema 1981, pp. 134-135, 138, Miedema 1985, and De Jongh 1995, pp. 114-115.

² For the second version, see: sale Berlin (Lepke), 9-10 April 1937, lot 83 (as by Jordaens and Janssens, canvas, 70 x 85 cm). The original on canvas, *The gifts of the sea*, 269 x 377 cm, is in the Residenzgalerie in Salzburg; see D'Hulst 1982, p. 181. According to Robels 1989, pp. 140-141, Jordaens never worked together with Snijders.

³ The theme was not unknown in Flemish art. For example, Frans Francken II produced no less than 20 versions of scenes involving Neptune and Amphitrite; see Härtling 1989, pp. 97-113 and 310-314 (cat. nos. 276-297).

In earlier times an intensive collaboration between master and pupil was common practice in many artists' workshops. As a result, numerous works were the product of more than one person and the fact that frequently one hand could not be distinguished from another rarely constituted a problem. Concepts such as authenticity and originality, which would acquire a moral charge in the twentieth century, were still unknown in the seventeenth century.¹ Moreover, different criteria and judgments applied to a phenomenon such as the replica. That far greater value was attached to replicas than would later be the case, in the time of glorified originality, is completely understandable.

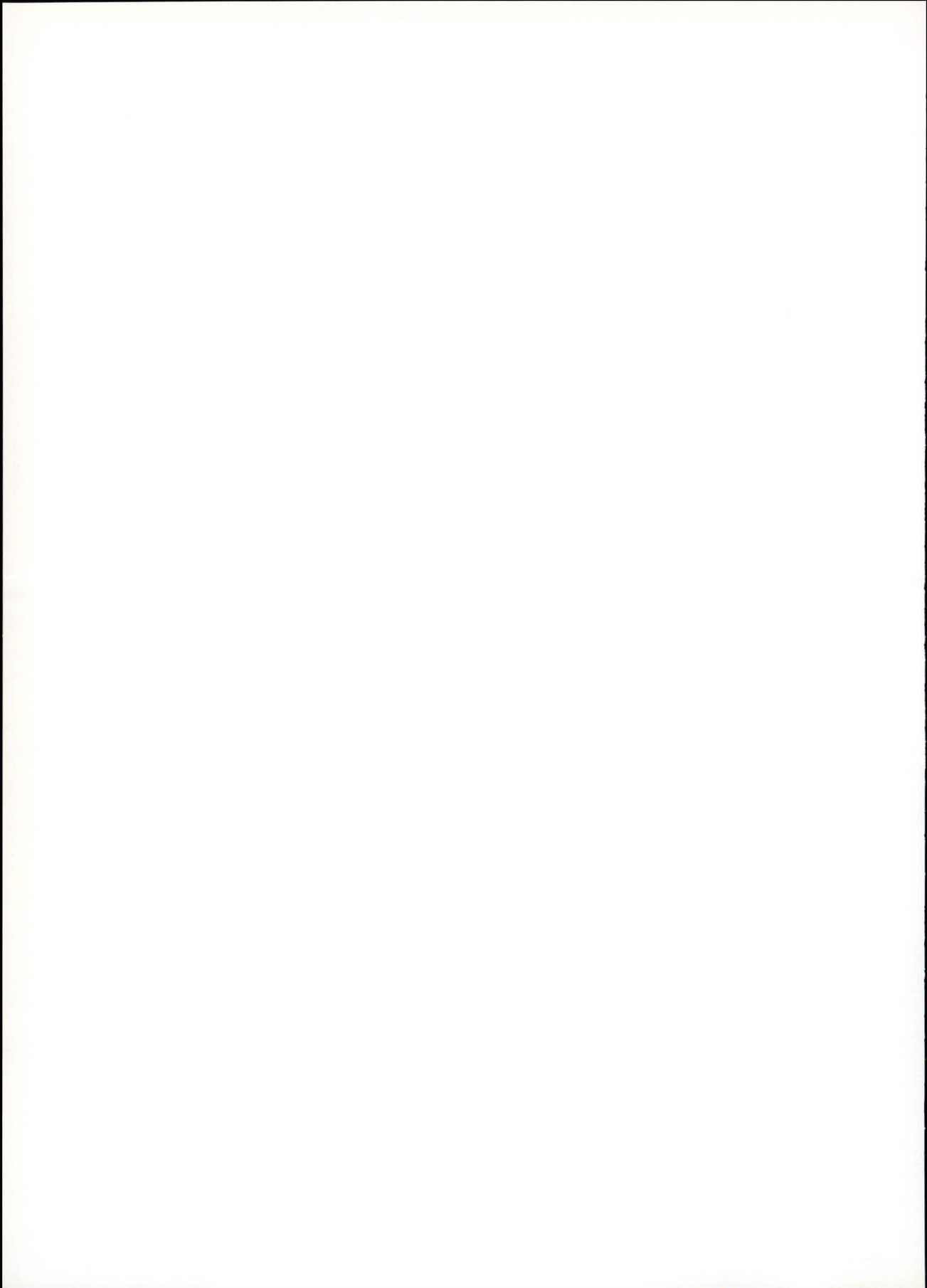
Replicas of countless paintings were made either by the master himself or more often by his assistants or pupils. The quality of these works is sometimes very close indeed to that of the originals. A painting that was multiplied in this fashion, an allegory of the catch, was produced by Jacob Jordaens (responsible for the figures) and Frans Snijders (the fish) in the 1640s. A talented assistant was subsequently set to work presumably in Jordaens' workshop to turn out two considerably smaller replicas.² One of these is the fine painting in Schloss Ehrenburg.

The picture presents a squadron of mythological sea creatures glorifying the catch and fishery in general. Amidst the figures emerging from the water can be distinguished a corpulent old man with a trident and a female creature also armed with such a weapon. They are the most prominent figures and, moreover, immediately recognisable as

Neptune, the god of the sea, and his wife Amphitrite surrounded by their usual entourage, Tritons and Nereides treading water, some of whom blow on a triton's horn.³ Seated on a hill at the left are two other figures from the world of the gods, Cupid fishing with a pole and behind him Mercury. Whether the god of commerce is using his caduceus to give Cupid some useful instruction or just pointing at the naval company is not entirely clear.

The catch is embodied by the substantial number of water creatures of various kinds. Among the bounty spread over a small section of a beach can be discerned sturgeon, gurnard, lamprey, turbot, wolf fish and cod, along with a male spotted ray boasting an entirely visible reproductive organ, some turtles, two young seals and a multitude of shells. In the right foreground a sea nymph shows off a pearl necklace and a beautiful branch of red coral. The two main figures contribute to the display. Impaled on Neptune's trident are two spectacular flatfish, and caught on Amphitrite's are an enormous salmon, an eel, and possibly a conger.

This kind of representation, originating in Antwerp in the 1640s, cannot have been perceived as 'value free', in other words without any political associations. Accordingly, it is virtually inconceivable that Jordaens and Snijders only meant to portray a bizarre water ballet of mythical aquatic creatures, with a *tutti frutti* of the sea as an added attraction. Although their painting will have also been appreciated for



⁴ Prims 1941-1942, vol. VIII-1, pp. 231-233, and vol. VIII-2, pp. 269-279; Smit 1966; and Boelmans Kranenburg 1980.

⁵ See Martin 1972, pp. 178-187. Among the many artists who contributed to this urban decoration was Jacob Jordaens: Martin 1972, pp. 50, 57, 67, 74-75, 87, 91.

⁶ Gevartius 1642, pp. 147-150, and the engravings by Theodoor van Thulden facing pp. 146 and 147.

its artistry, its unusual iconography is difficult to understand as anything other than an inversion of a very real situation, namely the barren political and economic circumstances in which the city of Antwerp found itself, partly as a result of the Hollanders having closed off their access to offshore waters. Due to the ongoing wartime activities and the protracted blockade of the Schelde River, maritime trade as well as the importation of fish were limited and the situation of the Southern Netherlandish fishery was generally precarious. Yet the demand for fish – the common man's food *par excellence* – remained as great as always and largely exceeded the local supply.⁴

What Jordaens and his colleague wished to depict was certainly not reality, but rather a rose-coloured future. The Peace of Munster was drawing near, but in the end this treaty – which presumably no one suspected at the time – afforded virtually no solace to the port of Antwerp. In terms of free trade, Antwerp was also curbed after 1648, something even Mercury could not prevent.

Incidentally, this god had earlier played an important role in the Antwerp political iconography, among others as a central figure in one of the monumental painted decorations after designs by Rubens that were mounted in the city on the occasion of the joyful entry of the new governor, Archduke-Cardinal Ferdinand of Austria in 1635.⁵ However, Mercury's role here was in no way positive. In the 1642 publication on Ferdinand's entry, the god of commerce was tellingly referred to as *Mercurius abituriens*, namely Mercury leaving Antwerp because of its poor economic situation. The personifications depicted along with him of the city and the Schelde, *Antverpia et Scaldis*, share in this misfortune: Antwerp gestures in despair while Schelde, with shackled ankles, has fallen asleep. *Paupertas*, or Poverty, is also in attendance. Finally, positioned above Mercury in the composition, Neptune and Amphitrite are incapable of keeping him in Antwerp.⁶

In the following decade Jordaens and Snijders would draw upon the same traditional visual idiom for the sake of their joint allegory. However, they used it to convey an entirely different message than Rubens. **EdeJ**



5 Clara Peeters (active 1607-in or after 1621)

Still life of fish with a candlestick (Water) 1611

Oil on panel, 50 x 71.6 cm. Signed and dated, lower left: CLARA.P. A° 1611

Madrid, Museo del Prado, inv. no. 1621

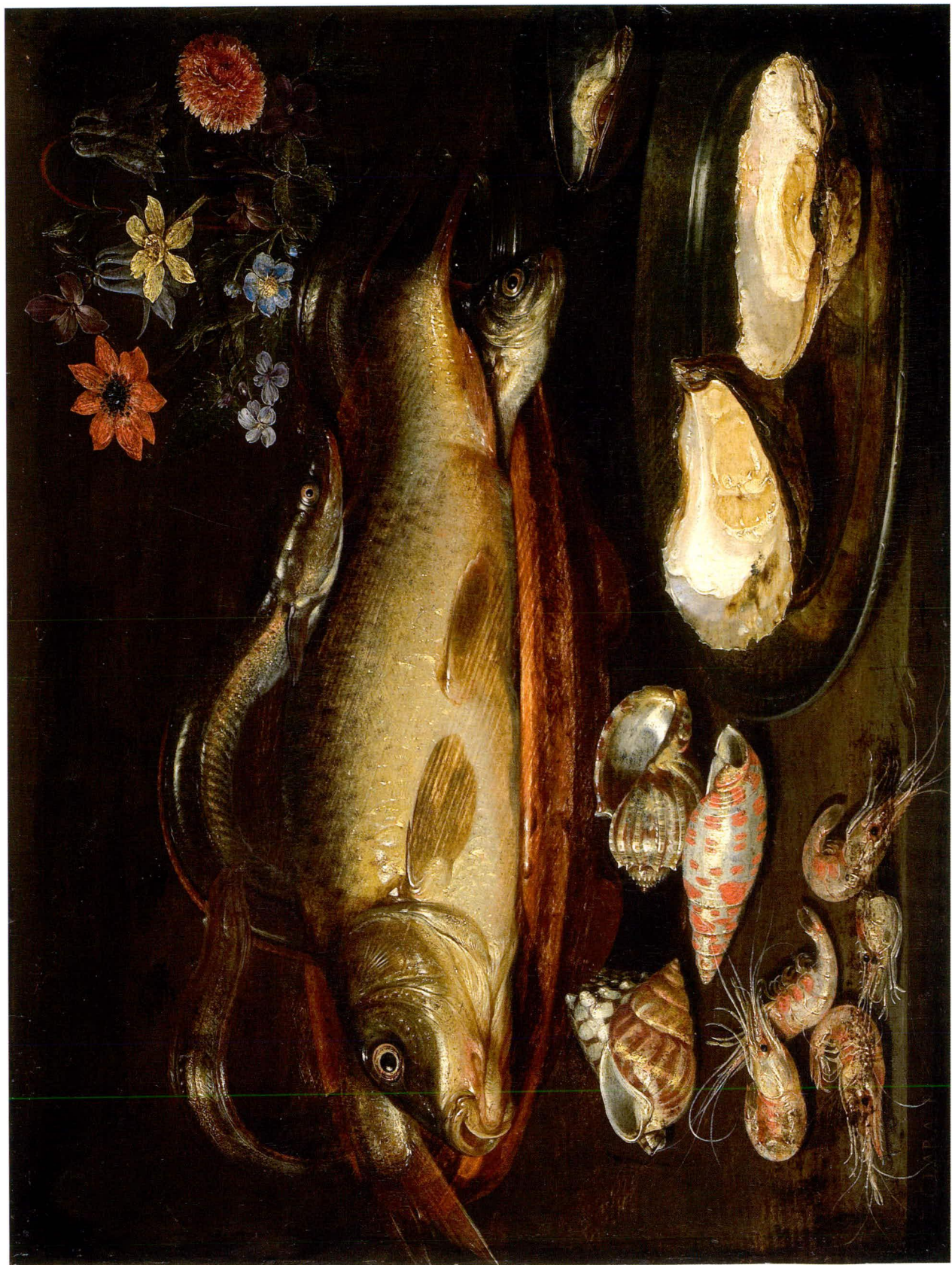
¹ Formerly with art dealers Hoogsteder & Hoogsteder, The Hague, see *The Hoogsteder Journal* no. 1, December 1996, pp. 11-13 and cover illustration.

² Similarly, *Air* would be *Autumn* and *Earth* either *Spring* or *Summer*. It is more difficult, however, to identify one of the latter two seasons in *Fire*. For similar symbolism, see a set of four paintings by Lucas van Valckenborch and Georg Flegel (with *Winter* as a fish market in winter), Frankfurt 1993-1994, cat. nos. 4-7.

To our knowledge, this painting by Clara Peeters is the earliest dated fish still life to have been painted in the Netherlands. It belongs to a set of four works, three of which are dated 1611, while the fourth agrees with the others in size, composition and execution. Together they represent the Four Elements: *Earth* (a still life of a vase of flowers, nuts, sweetmeats and dried fruit, and drinking utensils), *Air* (a live falcon and dead birds), *Fire* (products of that element, such as pastry, earthenware and metal ware, and roasted capons), and *Water* (fish). The latter painting presents various freshwater fish, including carp, pike, ide and roach, laid out on earthenware and wooden dishes and draped over each other. At the left is a pile of boiled crabs and near the edge of the table at the front are three shrimp. Peeters painted her fish with great accuracy and attention to detail, as she did all of the elements in her still lifes.

This may well have been the first occasion on which Clara Peeters

rendered fish: the dead creatures have been studied carefully, and there is nothing mechanical in their execution. As in many of such early still lifes, the objects and animals are arranged next to one another parallel to the edge of the table. Behind this is a second row of objects, including a strainer with some artichokes, a candlestick and an elaborately decorated Rhenish stoneware jug. Those objects appear to have been painted with far greater ease and experience than the fish and this is not surprising for wine glasses and a candlestick feature in the artist's earliest known dated still life of 1607.¹ Unlike the fish, they cannot be associated with the element of Water, except, perhaps, for the brass strainer and the skimmer. The same holds true for objects found in the other still lifes in this group, such as the orange in *Fire* and the pile of porcelain dishes in *Air*. However, another kind of symbolism may underlie this group of still lifes, namely that of the Four Seasons, in which case the fish still life would represent Winter.² FGM



6 Clara Peeters (active 1607-in or after 1621)

Fish still life with a small bouquet of flowers c. 1615

Oil on panel, 25 x 35 cm. Signed lower left: CLARA.P.

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-A-2111

Clara Peeters may have initially decided to paint fish for a purely iconographic purpose, namely their traditional association with the element of Water (see cat. no. 5). She subsequently clearly took a liking to the subject, and the various fish pieces she painted bear witness to her delight in rendering the shiny, scaly creatures and the products of the sea with which she could embellish the paintings.

The elements assembled in this still life, however, do not occur together in nature: the fish – carp, eel and roach – are freshwater fish, while the shrimp, oysters and mussels live in the brackish coastal waters. They are all indigenous, however, which is not the case for the (former) inhabitants of some of the four seashells that add to the decorative properties of this little painting. Among them is a *Conus Marmoreus*. Such shells were brought to the Netherlands on board East Indiamen, together with all kinds of rare items that aroused the collecting instincts of wealthy individuals.

At that time, a bouquet of flowers was also a rarity and to find one on a table next to a dish of fish would surely have surprised Peeters' contemporaries, as much as it does us. Of the numerous still lifes painted by the artist, many, if not most, are floral still lifes or at least include a vase of flowers. These flower paintings would have been viewed as something special by her contemporaries for a number of reasons, including the fact that flowers that bloom in different seasons were often combined in a single painting.

When looking at flower still lifes one is inclined to remark that nothing is missing, except for the blossoms' lovely scent, while in the case of fish still lifes viewers are generally relieved that they come without the smell. Perhaps Clara Peeters intended a witty visual pun when she combined flowers and fish in this small still life. It would be too far-fetched to call the painting an allegory of Smell, however. **FGM**



7 Jacob Foppens van Es (active 1617-1666)

Still life of fish on a counter c. 1635

Oil on canvas, 84 x 216 cm. Signed lower right: V:ES:f:

Frankfurt am Main, Das Städel, inv. no. 691

¹ Oil on canvas, 46.4 x 80 cm, signed and dated 'frco Barranco fec 165.', sale New York (Sotheby's), 25 May 2000, lot 26, with colour ill., as by F. Barranco.

² Curiously, the painting is said to be signed with the initial H rather than I (as usual) or J, which led to an attribution to Hans van Essen (Dordrecht 1962, cat. no. 49). In my view there is no doubt whatsoever that this painting is by Jacob van Es.

Although not particularly well known to a broad audience, Jacob van Es ranks among the best Flemish still-life painters of his time. The technical quality of his work is high and his powerful compositions combine an overwhelming directness and sense of spatial relations with an almost serene stillness. As this magnificent fish still life shows, his work is less delicate than that of Clara Peeters and less turbulent and baroque than that of Frans Snijders (see cat. nos. 2-6). Van Es' broad and forceful execution led to the misattribution of at least one of his fish still lifes to a Spanish artist.¹ Another good example of a fish still life by Van Es is dated 1631, and only slightly smaller than the work on view.² The strong similarities in style and handling suggest that the Frankfurt painting also originated in the early 1630s.

This still life has been described as *Fish on a kitchen counter*, but the scene could equally represent the counter of a fish stall. The fact that the salmon has been sliced and the flounder incised does not necessarily mean they have been prepared for cooking. The dark green pot with a red lid to the right contains a white substance, probably salt,

which could just indicate either conservation or preparation. The wooden bucket most likely contains water to keep the fish fresh. The only items that might suggest a kitchen rather than a fish stall are the herbs on the counter in the left background and middle foreground. Most of all, though, this is an artistic interpretation of a table with fish; it is unlikely that in real life we would find such a great variety of fish and only one or two specimen of each, neatly arranged and displayed in interesting poses. And, what kitchen maid or fish seller would think of placing a blue cloth in such a fashion that it balances the warm orange-pink of the salmon in the other half of the composition? The artist also cleverly interrupted the horizontal scope of the painting with the wooden bucket that rises above the fish and the carp hanging from a piece of string attached to a hook in the centre of the composition.

The unusual size of this still life suggests that it was commissioned for a specific location, for instance the assembly room of a fish sellers' guild. Because of its perspective, it was probably meant to hang fairly high on a wall, though not as high as an overdoor. FGM



8 Alexander Adriaenssen (1587-1661)*Still life of fish with a cat* c. 1640-1645

Oil on panel, 60 x 91 cm. Signed: Alex. Adriaenssen fe.

Madrid, Museo del Prado, inv. no. 1341

¹ Spiessens 1990 counts 171 signed paintings and 24 attributed ones, to which can be added several previously unrecorded works that have since turned up.

² Inv. nos. 1342, 1343 and 1344. Details about and the whereabouts of the other two are unknown. As Spiessens 1990, p. 177, suggests, they may have been lost in the fire of 1734 at the Alcázar Palace. On the other hand, she found a game still life of the same size, her cat. no. 142, which could conceivably be one of the lost paintings.

³ Oil on panel, 41 x 58.5 cm, signed in full, private collection, Vienna, 1966. An unsigned still life, oil on panel, 60.5 x 85.5 cm, in the museum in Kharkov (Spiessens 1990, cat. no. 106), also features the same motif, as well as a very similar barrel of oysters. These repetitions were also observed by Spiessens 1990, p. 174 (she did not mention the painting in Kharkov, however). The other comparisons of motifs that she makes are less convincing. Judging from his manner, Adriaenssen was not an artist who was inclined to repeating motifs verbatim.

Alexander Adriaenssen was a prolific painter. His oeuvre consists of more than 200 still lifes, of which, in addition to images of game, flowers and fruit, the majority are fish still lifes or pictures of mounds of fish along with other elements.¹ Grey, brown and silvery tones prevail in the fish pieces, enlivened with red and pink accents. Adriaenssen's brushwork is rather loose, swift and fluid and his works are generally relatively small. The production of such paintings will not have required much labour and their restricted colour scheme allowed the painter to employ relatively cheap pigments. As a result, his paintings were probably not very expensive and thus also available to buyers with limited means.

This notwithstanding, the present still life entered into a notable collection early on. But then it exceeds Adriaenssen's average quality and may well have been painted specifically for export to Spain. In any case, in 1652 the Marquis of Léranes, Don Diego Felipe de Guzmán de Mexía († 1655), bequeathed it to the Spanish King, Philip IV, together with five other still lifes by Adriaenssen. Four of the six are now in the Museo del Prado in Madrid.² Although they are all about the same size,

they do not make up an iconographic unity, like Clara Peeters' series in the same collection (see cat. no. 5). The group consists of two still lifes of fish, a still life of cheese, herring and bread, and one of game (which also includes a dish with a pike). None are dated, but their early provenance as well as comparison with dated pieces suggest that they were probably painted in the first half of the 1640s. However, Adriaenssen's style and handling hardly changed over the years and it is difficult to place his undated works in chronological order.

Adriaenssen regularly repeated motifs in his still lifes. An almost identical dish with two haddocks, for instance, is the central motif in a still life in a private collection.³ Adriaenssen often included a thievish cat in his fish pieces, like the one here reaching hungrily for a haddock. Its presence doubtless serves several purposes: the domestic cat had become an almost proverbial fish eater and thus was easily associated with fish. Moreover, its unconscious inclination to steal warns the viewer of this crime. Finally, by introducing the cat, the artist could substantially enliven his composition of dead fish. **FGM**



9 **Adriaen van Utrecht** (1592-1652)

A fishmonger's stall c. 1640

Oil on canvas, 215 x 298 cm. Signed in monogram lower right (on the barrel): AVV

Ghent, Museum voor Schone Kunsten, inv. no. S-10

¹ See Ghent 1986-1987, cat. no. 37, and Alexander Wied's discussion of the painting in Vienna/Essen 2002, cat. no. 64. Wied implies that, since the painting is known to have come from the kitchen of St Peter's Abbey in Ghent, it was painted for that location, which would contradict an all too worldly interpretation of the image. This view of the situation, however, seems somewhat oversimplified.

In this impressive painting by the Antwerp still-life and animal painter Adriaen van Utrecht, the figures, particularly the tall woman in her conspicuous red and dark blue clothing, attract almost as much attention as the lavish still life of fish that takes up two-thirds of the picture plane. The woman holds up her brass bucket to the fish seller, while a young boy surreptitiously swipes her purse, engaging the viewer as an eyewitness through his direct gaze. Whether this scene should be seen as an erotically charged or a more general moralising image is largely up to the viewer, however the painter certainly intended to portray more than just a scene of stealing, buying, and selling.¹

While the figures may be the work of an (as yet unidentified) collaborator, the fish still life itself shows Adriaen van Utrecht at his best. The artist's approach to his subject differs substantially from Frans Snijders' (see cat. no. 2). While the latter's work is loose and painterly, and full of motion, Van Utrecht's tends to be more precise and restrained. And, while the term *ijnschilderkunst* (painting in a refined and meticulous manner) can hardly be applied to a painting this size, Van Utrecht ensured that his fish were rendered in full and exact detail. He was

primarily concerned with their volume and the delicacy of their flesh and skin, rather than the slippery wetness that Snijders so revelled in. As a matter of fact, Van Utrecht's fish do not look at all wet. Moreover, he arranged them neatly by species, the freshwater fish on a smaller table, separate from the sea fish. Most of the fish lie parallel to the diagonal running from the lower left to the upper right, which actually divides the composition in two: the figures at the left and the fish at the right. The shapes and positions of the basket, barrels and the table edges prevent this diagonal effect from becoming overly dominant.

Like Snijders, Adriaen van Utrecht's selection of fish and other creatures of the water is lavish. In addition to salt- and freshwater fish, presented here are crab, lobster, oysters and mussels as well as fish in various forms of preparation and conservation: sliced, cut, dried and smoked. Contrary to Snijders, however, he omitted squid, along with turtles and seals. He must also have decided that the inclusion of a scavenging cat might distract the viewer from the events at the left – even though such a cat could well have underscored their implications. **FGM**



10 Joannes Fijt (1611-1661)

Still life of fish with a monkey, under two garlands of fruit c. 1650

Oil on canvas, 119.5 x 153.7 cm. Signed lower right: Joannes Fyt
Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, inv. no. 883C

¹ W. Prohaska, in Vienna/Essen 2002, p. 346 (cat. no. 122). The writer states that the monkey is facing the viewer, which is not correct, however.

² Compare, for example, his *Still life with a dead hare*, oil on canvas, 79 x 92 cm, signed and dated 1650, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Wilstach collection., inv. no. 123; and *Game birds and fruit with a spaniel and an African grey parrot*, oil on canvas, 98 x 132 cm, signed and dated 1652, in a German private collection, Amsterdam/Cleveland 1999-2000, cat. no. 43, colour ill.

This impressive painting, which combines a double garland of fruit and a fish still life with a live monkey, is exceptional not only in Joannes Fijt's oeuvre, but also in the genre of fish still lifes and even in Netherlandish still-life painting of the seventeenth century. Fijt was mainly a painter of game still lifes and of scenes with live animals. Although he does not appear to have particularly favoured fish, he nevertheless portrayed the specimens in the painting on view as convincingly as he did dead hares, deer and fowl. The distinctly slippery fish bodies have slid to one side of their slightly tilted dish. The white napkin only just prevents a large pike from slipping onto the floor. The costly chased dish in which Fijt presents his choice of freshwater and sea fish, including carp, haddock and tench, rests upon a table covered with a thick velvet cloth.

Garlands of fruit (but chiefly also of flowers) were first painted early in the seventeenth century by Jan Brueghel the Elder as frameworks around religious scenes. Brueghel thus introduced a primarily Flemish pictorial idiom. Such garlands often allude to the prosperity and plenty

generously provided by God. Similarly, the painting could be read as 'praise of fish'. It could well have been commissioned by a patron who owed his wealth to the fish trade and wished to acknowledge this in the form of the present painting. It is difficult to imagine Fijt producing this colourful, luxurious piece for the free market and unlike most fish still lifes, it probably occupied a prominent place in a private residence, in the dining room for instance.

It has been suggested that the little monkey represents *Imitatio*, and as such alludes to the artist's ability to mimic nature through his art.¹ This is not impossible, but at the same time, the animal occupies the place often held by a dog in Fijt's game pieces, one that eagerly admires the catch, and literally enlivens the image.

Fijt's style and execution are quite consistent, making it difficult to date his work, but comparison of this still life with dated paintings suggests that it originated around 1650.² FGM



11 Peeter Boel (1622-1674)

Still life of fish on a quay c. 1660-1665

Oil on canvas, 166 x 156 cm

Dieppe, Château-Musée, inv. no. 995.1.1

¹ For such a work by Boel within another painting, see fig. 12, p. 30.

² Sale London (Sotheby's) 15 April 1999, lot 87, ill. in colour, as circle of Giuseppe Recco. An indistinct inscription at the lower left was deciphered with considerable imagination as 'An^o 1640/ Vienna./ ...Ma...'. The numerals 6, 4 and 0 are clearly legible, but in view of Boel's chronology they cannot be a date. The rest of the inscription is too damaged to allow a proper reading. The image in the background of a ship in a storm before a rocky shore may well be a somewhat later addition.

³ See Amsterdam/Cleveland 1999-2000, cat. no. 64, ill. in colour, and Vienna/Essen 2002, cat. no. 50, ill. in colour.

Like his teacher Joannes Fijt, Peeter Boel mainly depicted still lifes of game and of live animals. The painting exhibited here is one of his few still lifes of fish, and its superb quality is cause to regret he does not appear to have painted many more of them.¹

After his apprenticeship with Fijt, Boel travelled to Italy. In Genoa he was greatly impressed by the work of Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (1609-1664). Given that he was back in Antwerp by 1650, he could not have seen many of the early fish still lifes by artists such as Giovan Battista Recco (active mid-seventeenth century) from Naples, but perhaps he ran across works like this in Antwerp. Whatever the case may be, this still life clearly bears witness to Boel's vivid interest in Italian Baroque (still-life) painting. It is no wonder that an oil study by Boel including some of the fish and the turtle seen in this painting has been offered as an Italian work.² Names have been inscribed next to some of the fish in that study, such as 'RúPPen' (burbot) and 'Roie forela' (sea trout).

Aside from the marked Italian influence, Boel may well have been inspired by a similar painting by Joannes Fijt probably originating in

the 1650s (fig. 11, p. 28). Boel's canvas is a mature work and therefore is dated to the first half of the 1660s. Although very different in subject, composition and execution, it is very close to his allegorical still life in Lille from 1663.³

Like many other works of this type, Boel's painting does not represent a realistic situation, let alone a fisherman's catch. It belongs to the many images that can be interpreted as an allegory of Water, as praise of God's gifts from the water, or as a celebration of the fishing trade. Boel's choice of fish is not a common one. Rarely are whole salmon encountered in still lifes, and sea trout and burbot are equally scarce. The tub gurnard and lumpsucker were doubtless selected for their colour and unusual shape, respectively. Boel's greatest feat and simultaneously the proof of his mastery is the depiction of the huge halibut draped atop this mound of fish. He quite audaciously presented it from the side and not frontally or curled up, as most of his fellow painters habitually did. **FGM**



12 Peeter Boel (1622-1674) and Erasmus II Quellinus (1607-1678)*Neptune with the gifts of the sea* c. 1665-1670

Canvas, 93 x 118.5 cm

Prague, Národní galerie v Praze, inv. no. DO 4357 (Z 810)

¹ See Braunschweig 1994-1995, pp. 84-85 (no. 29), and Slaviček 2000, p. 225 (no. 243). See also De Bruyn 1985, pp. 284-285; and De Bruyn 1994, p. 198.

² Ovid 1976, pp. 252-253 (Book XI, v. 221-265).

³ Ibidem, p. 277, v. 235-236.

⁴ Den Bosch/Louvain 2002, pp. 178-180 (nos. 116-117).

⁵ A bill issued by the Forchoudt firm of art dealers in Antwerp, dated 16 October 1671, mentions a Vulcan (the personification of Fire), which possibly belonged to the same series as the Neptune: '1 Vulcan by Peeter Boel, the figures by Erassimus Quellinus sold to Mister Bemijn'; see Denucé 1931, p. 154.

If there is any painting that may be described as a supreme example of pictorial overfishing and to which the shifting term 'baroque style' may justifiably be applied, then it is this collaborative work by Peeter Boel and Erasmus II Quellinus entitled *Neptune with the gifts of the sea*.¹ The main character in the scene is not immediately evident, however. Is it the sea god with his trident, or is it the unmistakably pregnant woman in the shallow water in the middle ground, accompanied by her consort in a vessel drawn by tritons and surrounded by other creatures? These centrally placed male and female figures can be identified as Peleus and the sea nymph Thetis, whose turbulent love story is revealed in the 11th book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The Roman poet's tale ends with the statement that Thetis was impregnated by the legendary hero in a grotto she liked to visit, where the couple had also met for the first time.²

Quellinus and Boel's composition strongly suggests that the pictorial plane corresponds with the entrance to Thetis' beloved grotto, so that the viewer looks out from this space. Ovid also says of the grotto: 'whether made by nature or art one may not surely say, but rather by art (*magis arte tamen*).'³ Undoubtedly the two artists, especially the erudite Quellinus, would have known their Ovid; it seems probable that they

endeavoured in their own fashion to make the grotto more artful by means of an enormous festoon comprised of all kinds of fish. Cod, European brook lamprey, carp, eel and sturgeon, lumpfish, halibut and ray, garfish, gurnard, allis shad, a cuttlefish and a North Sea crab – Peeter Boel strung them all together in a gigantic garland, thereby giving the painting a highly decorative character. This garland also alludes directly to contemporary Flemish tapestries, especially an allegorical work entitled *The months of January and February* and its cartoon (design), by the Antwerp painter Jan van den Hoecke, which also features many aquatic creatures.

The humorous motif in the foreground of the Quellinus-Boel painting, the two *putti* dragging an enormous fish, even seems to have been taken from the cartoon.⁴

It is highly feasible that this painting originally was part of a series representing the Four Elements, as an allegory of Water with Neptune as its personification.⁵ The lethargic-looking Neptune is also the image of the god in the Quellinus-Boel canvas from the museum in Dieppe (cat. no. 13) which displays characteristics more befitting of a river god than of the generally more dynamic sea god. Edel



13 Peeter Boel (1622-1674) and Erasmus II Quellinus (1607-1678)

River god ca. 1665-1670

Canvas, 119.8 x 99.7 cm

Dieppe, Château-Musée, inv. no. 974.2.1

¹ Paris 1977-1978, p. 263.

² De Bruyn 1988, pp. 63 and 221 (cat. no. 167).

³ Denucé 1931, p. 122; De Bruyn 1985, pp. 278 and 283.

⁴ Rutgerus Ouwens in Poot 1750, pp. 740-748.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 747-748.

⁶ Vlieghe 1998, p. 85.

The term 'neo-Rubenesque' was once used to describe this painting of a river god, produced some ten to fifteen years after Rubens' death.¹ Erasmus II Quellinus must have known Rubens quite well; at any rate he contributed to his artistic undertakings on several occasions, collaboration being a major driving force behind the enormous output from Rubens' workshop.² The present painting also displays the results of a collaboration in which Quellinus presumably took the initiative. A figure painter himself, Quellinus brought in his colleague Peeter Boel to depict an assortment of fish.

This is not the only picture that the two painters produced together, as evidenced by surviving contemporary sources, such as a detailed bill issued in 1671 by the Antwerp art dealer Willem Forchoudt, which includes the item: '1 Sea god by Quellinus, the fishes by Peeter Boel'.³ It is feasible that this entry actually refers to the River god in the museum in Dieppe. The fact that the clerk working for Forchoudt may have believed the painting portrayed a 'Sea god' might be explained by the hybrid attributes that accompany the half-naked old man.

Although the painting curiously bears a double title, *Dieu Fleuve* and *La Pêche Neptune*, most of the elements in this ensemble and the figure's attitude suggest that with all due respect to the ruler of the ocean, the second of these titles should be dropped. The bronze urn, on which

the figure rests his right arm, is in itself a typical attribute of a river god; in this instance three freshwater fish, a carp, a chub (?) and a pike, are even emerging from the vessel. The figure's sash of plant material and the leaves wound around his head are also attributes frequently worn by river gods.⁴ The fact that Quellinus depicted his god half reclining further emphasises his connection with a river, for river gods almost always are recumbent. According to an eighteenth-century antiquarian with a feeling for paradox: 'The Rivers are shown reclining to signify that it is their quality to run over the land'. Neptune, on the other hand, is generally depicted 'standing [...] on a very large seashell'.⁵

The iconographic confusion engendered by this painting is not due to any lack of knowledge or erudition on the part of either painter. Quellinus in particular was a true pictor doctus; as a Magister Philosophiae he even wrote a (lost) dissertation on philosophy.⁶ This does not alter the fact, however, that contradictory paraphernalia have been used in this work. The same figure, in the same pose, leaning on the same flask, also features in a detailed water and fish allegory by the same painters entitled Neptune with the gifts of the sea (cat. no. 12). Although the repetition does not help explain the confusion in this specific instance, it may say something about artists' rather casual attitude to iconography in general. EdeJ



14 Jan van Kessel I (1626-1679)*Fish on the shore of an estuary* 1661

Oil on copper, 20.1 x 30.1 cm. Signed and dated lower centre: I.V.KESSEL.FECIT. anno 1661

Frankfurt am Main, Das Städel, inv. no. 2167

¹ Compare, for instance, Van Kessel's works in the Daisy Linda Ward Bequest in Oxford, Ashmolean Museum; see Meijer 2003, cat. nos. 41-49.

Jan van Kessel's curiosity about the world around him, particularly the many manifestations of nature, must have been insatiable. His studies of butterflies, caterpillars, spiders and insects – life-size and meticulously rendered on a white background – are highlights of seventeenth-century still-life painting, even though they actually only border on that genre.¹ Van Kessel's countless small images of animals in a landscape are also almost an independent genre. The fish pieces (see also cat. no. 15) are the closest to still lifes because fish out of water tend to be awarded the status of objects, in contrast to the land animals that move around freely in the other works. Nevertheless, these images remain still-life-cum-landscape, or landscape-cum-still-life.

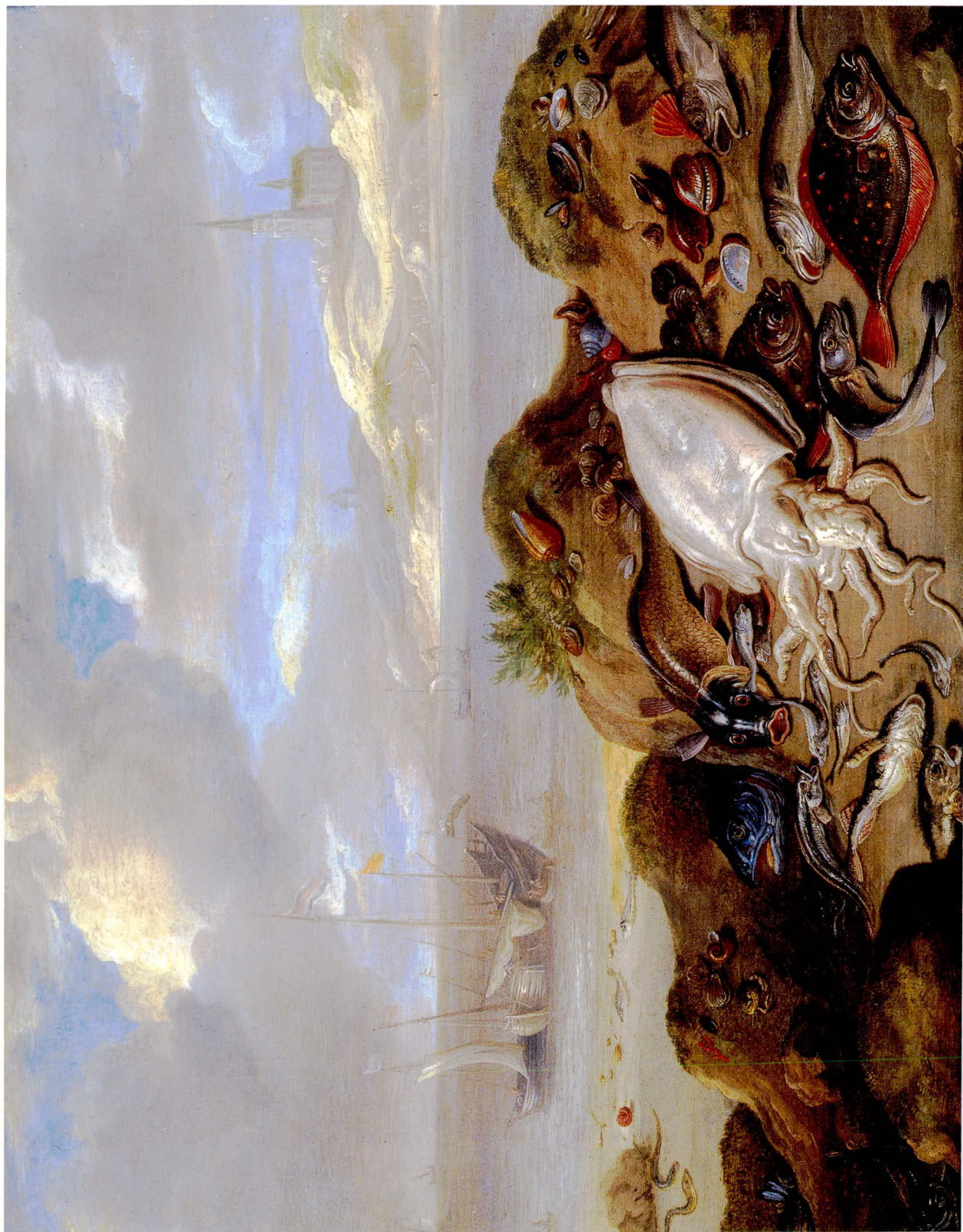
This little painting from Frankfurt ranks among the most successful and attractive examples of this type. Van Kessel relied greatly on the work of Jan Brueghel the Elder and the Younger. He began painting these kinds of compositions around the mid-1650s, and had developed his own idiom by 1660. The works from this period are inventive, detailed and refined in their execution, however in the course of the 1660s, and certainly after 1670, Van Kessel evinces a certain automatism and sloppiness.

In this composition, the artist has gathered a curious ensemble of

aquatic creatures. At the centre is an amalgam of freshwater fish and sea fish, lobsters, crab, turtles and a large variety of shells and even some coral. To the right are a large cuttle fish and some undefined fish with a large open mouth. On the shore in the left background are penguins and various water birds. Moreover, Van Kessel also populated the estuary waters behind his fish still life. The large fish near the opposite shore most likely is a whale. He depicted the animal on the basis of descriptions, rather than his own observations. The same probably also applies to the flying fish, huge animals with large, bird-like wings. Behind the lump-sucker to the left is a creature most likely meant to represent a crocodile.

The ships on this estuary undoubtedly represent human activity on the water. There are a fishing boat and a man-of-war or an armed merchant ship, along with a few unidentifiable vessels in the distance. Visible on the opposite bank are the wrecks of ships that clearly did not survive a storm. The church towering in the background is meant to remind us of God's omnipotence: He created all these wondrous and wonderful animals and watches over man's activities.

In addition to this thinly disguised Christian symbolism, it could be argued that given the many aspects of water displayed in the painting, it also represents the element of Water. **FGM**



15 Jan van Kessel I (1626-1679)

Sea fish on the shore c. 1660-1665

Oil on panel, 24 x 32.4 cm. Signed lower left: J V KESSEL.F.

P. de Boer Art Gallery, Amsterdam

¹ As noted by Lex Raat, the fish can be identified by its black head, but in contrast to the specimen in Van Kessel's rendering, the animal does not have fins on its belly.

² The first: oil on copper, 20 x 29 cm, Stuttgart, Württembergische Staatsgalerie, inv. no. 1088, the second: oil on copper, 20 x 30 cm, sale Brussels (Palais des Beaux-Arts), 29 February 1956, lot 394, ill. The cuttle fish occurs in both positions in Van Kessel's series representing Europe from 1664-1666 in Munich, Alte Pinakothek, where the frame of the scene in question is inscribed 'Lisbone'. In the same series, Antwerp, Copenhagen and Venice are also represented in the background of a display of fish and other aquatic creatures.

Although this painting of fish on a shore has much in common with the work by Jan van Kessel previously discussed (cat. no. 14), it is far less encyclopaedic in nature. All of the fish are sea fish and include some species rarely encountered in still lifes, such as the wolf-fish. Van Kessel's rendering of the creature, however, is not entirely accurate since he provided it with additional fins.¹ The focus in this painting is on the cuttle fish, shown with its white belly facing up. In Van Kessel's other painting it is shown at the right, lying on its belly, its brown back making it far less conspicuous. Van Kessel must have made a study of the animal, for it recurs identically in several other pictures, two of which are dated: 1660 and 1661.² The painting under discussion should also probably be dated to the first half of the 1660s.

While all the fish are inhabitants of the North Sea, the scene is not very realistic. Even were a fisherman to have casually spread out these

creatures on this dune top, he could not have afforded to enrich his display with such an abundance of sea shells, the majority of which hail from distant ocean shores. They were imported by the merchant fleets that sailed to the Indies, rather than being hauled in by local fishermen. Many were no doubt more expensive than the fish they accompany here.

If Van Kessel's other painting appears to be more of a general allegory of water, this one might be explained as an allegory of fishing. The fish could be regarded as a catch and the two vessels in the background are undoubtedly fishing boats. The fish and shells are God's generous gift from the sea to men, and His reward to those who toil to bring them to shore. God himself is embodied by the church atop a dune on the far shore – a rather unrealistic setting for such a structure. FGM

NORTHERN NETHERLANDS
THE HAGUE



16 Pieter de Putter (c. 1600-1659)

A fisherman with freshwater fish on a table c. 1640,

A fisherwoman with freshwater fish on a table c. 1640

Both oil on panel, 105 x 74 cm. Both signed lower centre: DPVR in monogram.¹

R.G. van Leeuwen collection, Eindhoven

¹ It is uncertain whether the signature on either painting should perhaps be transcribed as DPVTR.

² Generally, fisher folk could not afford to have their portrait painted. A work that does appear to be the portrait of a fisherman, but which is also reminiscent of *tronies* like De Putter's, is. *Portrait of a man as fisherman*, oil on canvas, 76 x 62 cm, signed Dirck Santvoort and dated 1633 (Warsaw, National Museum). This cannot plausibly be a portrait of a real fisherman, or even the likeness of a man who earned his money in the fish trade and commissioned this portrait as some sort of allegory. Its origins should more properly be sought within the context of the rhetoricians, and the sitter is most likely portrayed acting the part of a fisherman. See also Van Thiel 1961, p. 168, fig. 5. With thanks to Rudi Ekkart for the latter reference.

³ The other examples known to me are: oil on panel, 105 x 81 cm, signed, sale Amsterdam (F. Muller & Co.), 19 March 1919, lot 117, ill.; oil on panel, 98.2 x 71.8 cm, with Galleria Caretto, Turin, 1994, cat. no. 29, colour ill.; and oil on panel, 143.5 x 127 cm, signed, sale London (Christie's), 12 December 1986, lot 39, colour ill.

⁴ *Fish still life*, oil on panel, 56.3 x 72 cm, with the signature 'A. Adriaenssen'; present whereabouts unknown.

Pieter de Putter painted freshwater fish almost exclusively and in these pendants, too, they play an important role. However, the figures of a man and a woman towering over their respective tables of fish draw the most attention. They wear the characteristic garb of fisher folk, the man's coarse woollen cap instantly gives him away as a fisherman.

These two paintings are not portraits but so-called *tronies*, half-lengths representing a certain type of person; they are 'the fisherman' and 'the fisherwoman' in a general sense, rather than a portrayal of a specific (married) couple.² This becomes all the more clear when we realise that De Putter produced several paintings of such figures. The other known examples all depict men dressed in the same fashion and sporting similar grey beards and moustaches, while holding a pike. Interestingly, these paintings also include the strainer of small perch on top of a wooden bucket. The dimensions of those pictures are similar to those of the pendants on view here with the exception of one, which is substantially larger and has a more extensive still life of fish.³ Identically dressed fishermen also appear in De Putter's paintings of fisherman's sheds (cf. cat. no. 17).

Painting these companion pieces, De Putter observed the conventions for the composition of pendants very strictly. Not only are the two figures facing each other in almost the same pose, the two still lifes of fish are very nearly a mirror image of each other, in particular the large bream and the perch in the foreground.

The still lifes themselves are entirely in keeping with De Putter's individual still lifes of fish. The still life in the painting of the fisherwoman is almost identical, even in size, to a still life by the artist that was on the Belgian art market in 1996.⁴

Those looking for sexual connotations in such pictures will probably be satisfied by the way the man holds the pike and perhaps even the way in which the woman slightly tilts the strainer towards her partner in reply. Such paintings quite possibly refer to fertility – the baby perch in the strainer? – and abundance.

Since Pieter de Putter hardly ever dated his works and does not appear to have experienced any significant stylistic development, it is almost impossible to date these pictures. A date of origin around 1640 – with a very liberal margin – is entirely plausible for this couple. FGM



17 Pieter de Putter (c. 1600-1659)

A fisherman's interior c. 1650

Oil on panel, 47 x 63 cm. Signed middle right: DPut[...]f (DP in monogram)

Private collection, Europe

In addition to his many still lifes of fish on a table and fish still lifes with large figures (cf. cat. no. 16), Pieter de Putter produced a small number of fisherman's interiors, such as the painting under discussion. Like the vast majority of his still lifes proper, they usually show freshwater fish; the present example is one of the very few – if not the only one – to display sea fish. The other examples quite logically include views through an open door of fishing activities near a river or a lake, while here we see a beach with fishermen at work and a fishing boat at sea in the background.

A fisherman wearing a characteristic woollen cap and carrying a basket of freshly caught fish on his back has apparently just entered the space. A woman sits by a barrel that she uses as a table to prepare the fish on. She is incising a flat fish, probably a plaice, presumably for conservation. Most of the fish on the floor to the left have already received the same treatment. A couple of haddock rest in a strainer, ready to be rinsed with the water from the pump behind it. One of De Putter's distinctive cats has gotten hold of a small fish and is about to drag it out of sight.

A feature worth noting is that when De Putter included a woman and a man in such compositions, she is working while he is idle. Perhaps here the man is waiting for the woman to pay attention to him and help him unload his burden. On the other hand, this could (also) allude to the laziness generally imputed fishermen at the time (see p. 105).

The room is filled with utensils associated with fishing and the conservation and preparation of fish: a fishing net and a strainer hang on the wall, there are buckets and tubs of water, and a cauldron and a cooking pot. Only the barrel for churning milk next to the door seems somewhat out of place in this context. The pump, of course, is supposed to provide fresh water. However, one wonders just what kind of water this is meant to be here. In De Putter's fisherman's sheds near a lake or river the answer would be obvious, but a pump so close to the sea is more likely the result of artistic freedom than a reflection of an actual situation – just as the building's proximity to the sea can hardly be realistic. De Putter simply paraphrased his freshwater fish sheds without being aware of or worrying about the curious scene he created in doing so. **FGM**



18 Abraham van Beijeren (1620/21-1690)*Still life of fish in an interior with a view of fish trade on the beach* c. 1660

Oil on canvas, 105 x 95 cm. Signed lower right: AVB (in ligature)

Art dealers Hoogsteder & Hoogsteder, The Hague; private collection, Europe

¹ Including a painting in Cape Town, The Old Town House, Michaelis Collection, inv. no. 14/6.

² I am grateful to Lex Raat for bringing this to my attention.

³ See Bedaux 2000, p. 18. With thanks to Eddy de Jongh for reminding me of this passage.

This is a typical example of Abraham van Beijeren's many still lifes of fish in an interior. He painted several variants of this composition: a vertical format, showing fish spread out on a table with a view of the beach through a window in the background.¹ Van Beijeren rarely makes it completely clear whether we are looking at a kitchen or at some other site where fish are on display. The scales in this painting lying on a basket of fish in front suggest that the space is that of a fish seller, rather than a kitchen. The view of fishermen presenting their catch on the beach also links the image with the fish trade. The fact that the fish have been incised and that the salmon is seen already sliced into steaks does not necessarily mean that a kitchen has here been depicted, for fish are similarly presented in Van Beijeren's paintings of explicit fish stalls (see cat. no. 21).

Van Beijeren clearly developed his own vocabulary for the rendering of fish, combining a number of standard motifs and elements more or less at random. The basket with two fish lying back to back and parallel to the picture plane, as painted here, recurs in many of his fish still lifes. The two larger fish, usually haddock or whiting, often share the

shallow basket with a few salmon steaks or some plaice, dab, or flounder. It is striking that Van Beijeren almost always painted the eyes of his haddock and plaice somewhat too large, doubtless a deliberate inaccuracy intended to produce a calculated effect.² A similar exaggeration may also be observed in children's portraits.³

The wooden bucket with iron bands also is a recurring motif in Van Beijeren's fish pieces. Sometimes it contains mussels or fish offal, but in most instances it appears to be empty. The well pole next to it was used to lower the bucket into a ditch or a well to draw water. Other containers that could hold water also feature regularly in Van Beijeren's fish paintings, such as a chased brass bucket, or a large red earthenware pitcher.

Although the artist included a window in his composition, the light on the fish falls from the front left and not from behind. The illumination seems to be fairly even, yet the fish show up quite dramatically against the relatively dark background. This effect is enhanced by the convincing application of the highlights as tiny white dots, which also intensifies the impression of slipperiness and wetness of the shiny fish bodies. **FGM**



19 Abraham van Beijeren (1620/21-1690)*Fish on the beach* c. 1660

Oil on canvas, 91.5 x 113.5 cm. Signed lower left: AVB.f. (AVB in ligature)

Delft, Stedelijk Museum Het Prinsenhof (on loan from the Instituut Collectie Nederland, Rijswijk, inv. no. NK 2507)

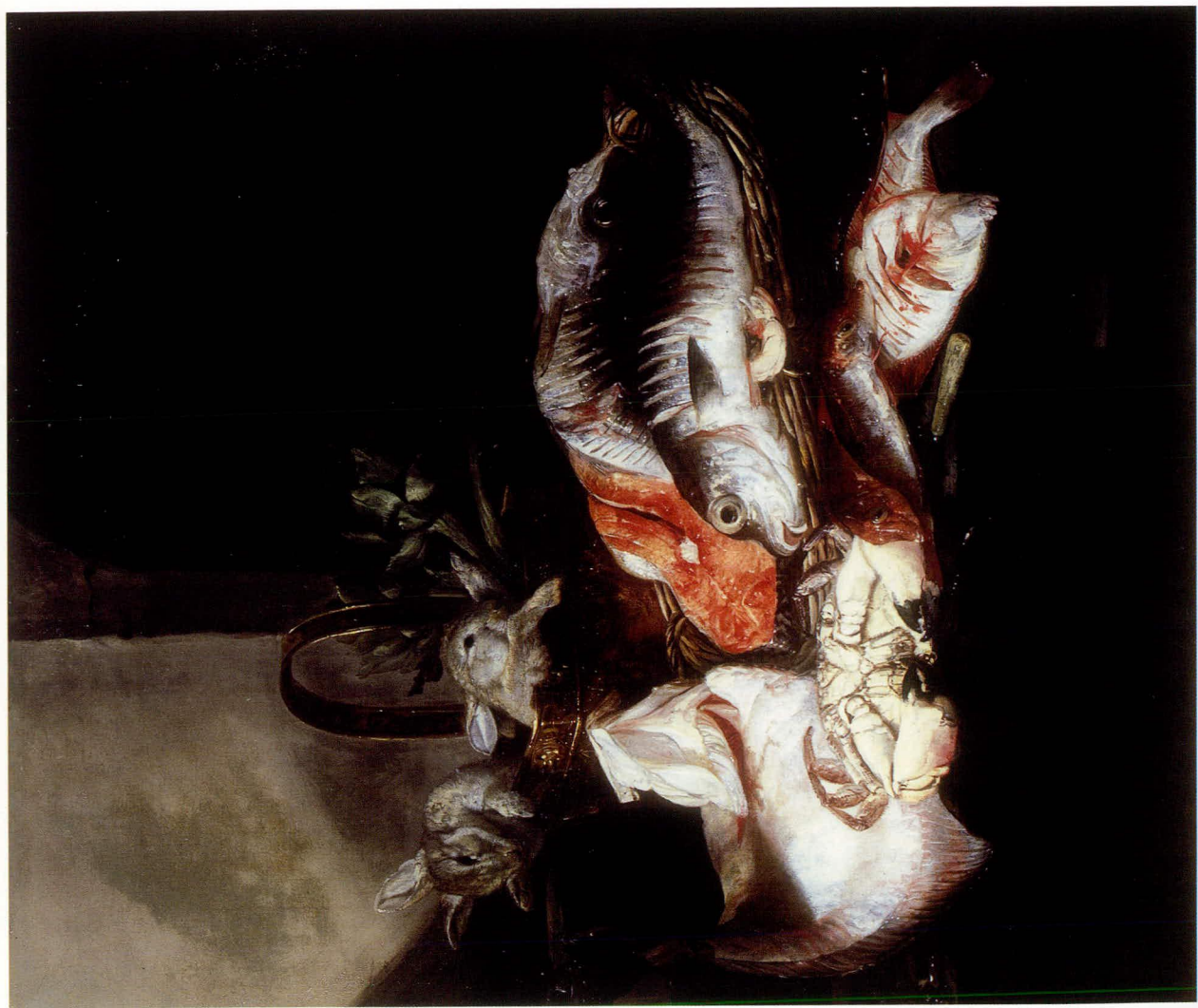
Seascapes are probably among Abraham van Beijeren's earliest subjects. The fact that he was asked to contribute to the *Fishery Board* for the Maassluis church (fig. 13, p. 89), executed in 1649, may well have been due to his reputation as a marine rather than a fish painter. This painting of fish on a beach clearly shows his command of the subject. The rolling waves and the perfectly positioned ships along with the impressive clouds gathering overhead leave little to be desired. Van Beijeren also demonstrates his abilities as a painter of figures here. The scenes in the background of an elegant couple in conversation with a boy, and some people huddled around fish on the beach at the right were rendered with apparent ease. Van Beijeren's figures are strongly reminiscent of the staffage in landscapes by Jan van Goyen and some of his sketches for them. Van Beijeren and Van Goyen had probably become acquainted in The Hague and the latter's work may well have served Van Beijeren as an example for his figures. One wonders whether Van Beijeren intended to indicate the difference in status and wealth between the fishermen and the rich burghers by placing the latter on a somewhat elevated part of the beach and separating them from the fishermen by a watercourse.

The fish in this still life are clearly presented as a fresh catch, perhaps ready to be loaded onto a cart like the ones taking off across the dune

top in the left background, probably on their way to a nearby fish market. The figures to the right may be fisher folk who are selling some of their catch directly; the man standing at the far right has already gathered some fish in his basket.

The two halibut at the left have a piece of string tied between their tails and mouths. This is often seen in fish still lifes and was probably done to facilitate the carrying of the heavy, slippery fish, which was difficult to handle otherwise. However, we have no image of a fish actually being carried in this manner. A halibut in a still life by Joannes Fijt, though, is shown hanging from a cord (fig. 11, p. 28).

In contrast to many other fish still lifes, this piece by Van Beijeren appears to be somewhat true to life. The animals are all from the North Sea, so they could be part of an actual catch. They also display no traces of preparation: the fish are not incised as in most of Van Beijeren's other fish still lifes, and the crabs and lobster have not been cooked, as they still have their natural colours. But even though the scene may seem realistic, the fact that most of these animals occur in the same pose in other still lifes by Van Beijeren makes it clear that the composition was, indeed, conceived in the studio with the aid of individual studies of fish and shellfish. **FGM**



20 Abraham van Beijeren (1620/21-1690)

Still life of sea fish with a bucket of rabbits and artichokes c. 1665

Oil on canvas, 102 x 91 cm

Dieppe, Château-Musée, inv. no. 991.3.1

¹ The other version is also oil on canvas, 97 x 87 cm, signed in monogram. It first appeared in sale Amsterdam (Frederik Muller), 31 May 1927, lot 650, ill., as dated 1665. Most recently it was with the art dealers Castendijk, Rotterdam, in 1989. It was advertised in *Die Weltkunst*, 1 December 1985, p. 3655 by Noortman, Maastricht, with a colour illustration. A third version may have been lost in the fire of 1862 that destroyed part of the collection of the Boymans Museum in Rotterdam, see Meijer 1989, p. 11 and fig. 3.

² Compare, for example, a still life with dead fowl and a mortar, from 1661, Ghent, Museum voor Schone Kunsten, inv. no. 1910-X, and a similar piece from 1663 in sale Amsterdam (Mak van Waay), 30 October 1979, lot 11, ill.

³ Oil on canvas, 102 x 127 cm, signed in monogram, Münster, Westfälisches Landesmuseum, inv. no. 1397 LM.

Except for a few details, Abraham van Beijeren painted two virtually identical versions of this composition.¹ The major difference concerns the two rabbits, which in the other version look livelier and even appear to crawl out of their bucket. There is one small indication that the painting exhibited here is the primary version: the paint of the tub gurnard in the centre foreground has become slightly transparent, which reveals that the crab in its entirety was painted first and the fish added later. In the other version, the tub gurnard seems to have been included in the composition from the very start. When the latter painting first turned up in 1927, it bore the date 1665, which has since disappeared. The consistency of Van Beijeren's style and handling makes it difficult to date his works. However, he dated a few other pictures in the early 1660s that, like this work, could be categorised as kitchen still lifes and which, moreover, include a comparable dark niche in the background.² Accordingly, it is entirely plausible that this painting and its twin date from around the same time.

Van Beijeren did not generally include other foodstuffs in his fish still lifes. Only a few exceptions to this are known, one of which is a fish still life with a big bunch of turnips.³ While the fish still life is prominent in the present painting, the eye is quickly drawn to the rabbits in the brass bucket, and from there to the artichokes sticking out of the same container. The combination of artichokes and fish is not unusual, either in a culinary respect or in paintings. Artichokes feature in Clara Peeters' earliest fish still life (cat. no. 5), for instance. The combination of fish and rabbits, however, does appear to be exceptional, but it is interesting to note that a rabbit is also conspicuously positioned – and in a similar brass bucket – among the fish in Harmen Steenwijck's fish stall (fig. 48, p. 62). Steenwijck was active in Delft, as was Van Beijeren when or shortly before he painted this composition. However, the similarities between only two paintings is insufficient evidence for suggesting that rabbits and fish were a typical Delft combination. FGM



21 Abraham van Beijeren (1620/21-1690)

The fishwife 1666

Canvas, 121.5 x 146 cm. Signed upper left with monogram and dated: AB f. 1666

Vienna, Akademie der bildenden Künste, Gemäldegalerie, inv. no. 760

¹ The set of scales, an indispensable piece of equipment for a fish seller, may have another metaphorical meaning, that of 'temperate behaviour' and 'moderation' (cf. cat. no. 55); in Van Beijeren's ornate still lifes a watch sometimes serves as a symbol of moderation, counterbalancing (harmful) excess; see Bergström 1956, pp. 189-190. For 'practising economy' see Montias 1990.

² Auckland 1982, pp. 121-123; Meijer 1998, p. 101.

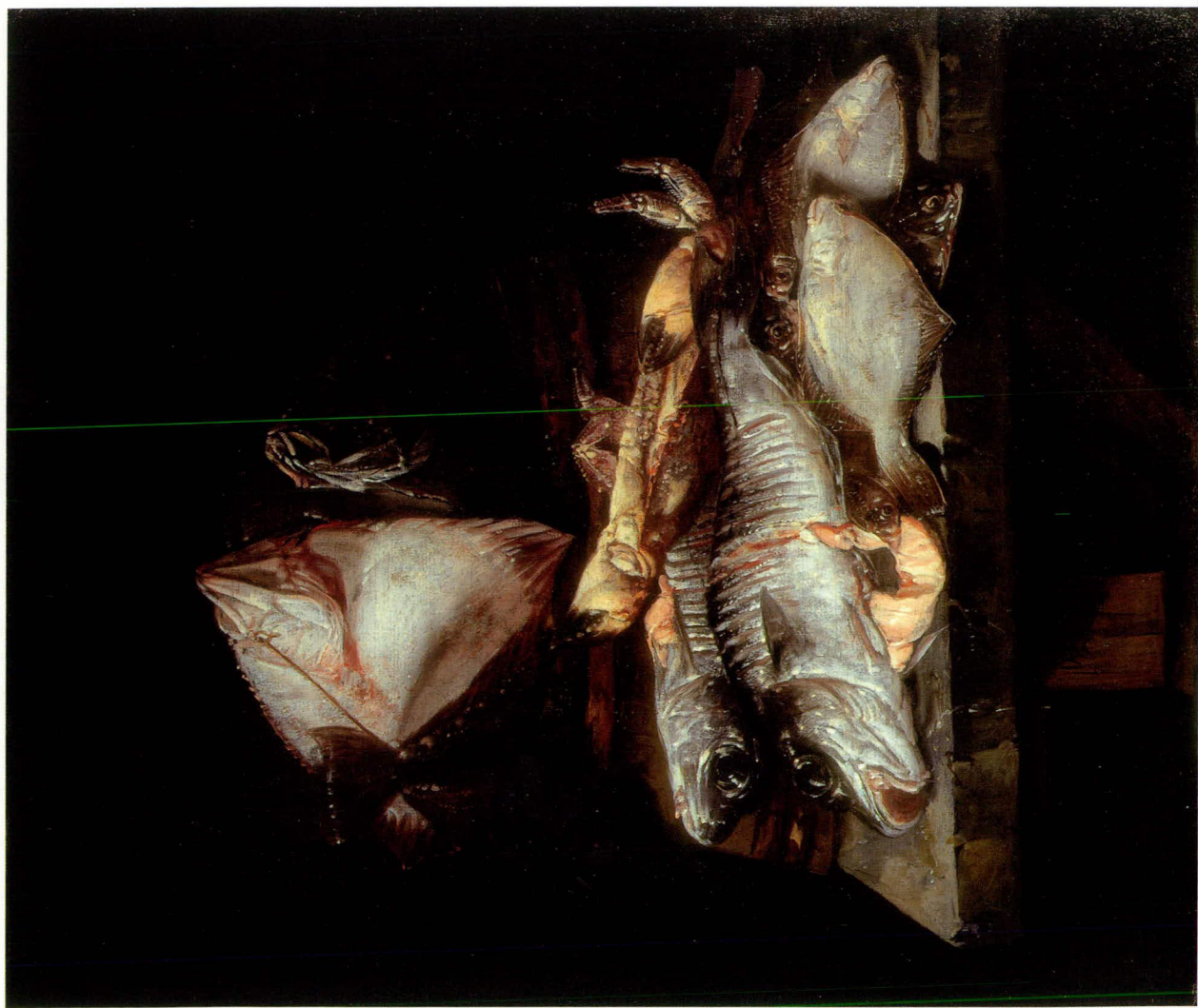
³ De Jongh 2000, pp. 40-41.

Abraham van Beijeren enlivened several of his fish still lifes with elements derived from other categories of painting. This work from 1666 not only portrays a fish seller, it also affords a view of the sea and a stretch of beach where the fish is being sold. Similar views recur in other representations by the artist (cat. no. 18), and this is certainly not the only feature that he repeatedly employed: the table leg with a carved Cupid's head and the set of scales at the upper left also occur in other works by his hand. Van Beijeren was one of those seventeenth-century painters who practised iconographic economy; in other words, who regularly drew from their own stock of motifs.¹

Even the principal element in the scene, the table laden with seafood, is a variation on many works by Van Beijeren based on a set but not overly strict compositional organisation. In this picture the *tableau de la troupe* on the table is made up of ray, brill or turbot, haddock, crab and lobster. Through their placement in relation to each other and coordination of their tone and colour, these creatures create an interesting pictorial unity, although the composition falls just short of the harmony of Van Beijeren's best works.²

Anyone familiar with seventeenth-century pictorial language, including its own distinctive piquant elements, can hardly fail to notice that the obscene gesture being made by the young woman behind the table – she is poking her middle finger through the opening in the centre of a salmon steak – adds both a colourful and a sexual accent to the scene. This motif should probably be savoured in association with another equally suggestive motif beneath the table, the jug with lip facing forward, a tried and tested symbol of the female genitals.³

This gesture with a salmon steak also appears in works by several other artists. For Van Beijeren the use of such a visual joke was far from routine, as it is found only a few times in his extensive oeuvre. It is difficult to determine to what extent the artist consciously employed this device to attract a certain type of buyer. The market strategy of other painters, such as Van Beijeren's contemporary Jan Steen, supports the conclusion that there was a certain interest in painted merriment with sexual overtones. Edel





22 Abraham van Beijeren (1620/21-1690)

Sea fish on a table c. 1670

Oil on canvas, 75 x 66 cm. Signed lower centre: .AVB.f. (AVB in ligature)

Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, inv. no. 1263

Various fish compete for the beholder's attention in this painting. The first to do so, naturally, are the haddock and plaice in the foreground, but the eye is almost immediately distracted by the large turbot, whose tail is connected to its mouth by a piece of string, its off-white underside catching a flood of light. Only at second glance do we discern another turbot turned the other way, which is far less noticeable because of its dark back. Van Beijeren presents the crab on top of the smaller fish upside-down and from the front. He thus compels the viewer to examine the painting more closely to determine what exactly he is looking at. Although the composition comprises the same kind of fish Van Beijeren always rendered, his approach here is somewhat more experimental than usual. His compositions are generally constructed along one or several flowing lines, yet here the arrangement is far more angular, lending the image greater drama. The fact that there are no distracting baskets, buckets or jugs in this painting, but just the plain wooden table

and the overturned tub upon which the halibuts are placed, gives this still life a sense of austerity otherwise rarely found to such an extent in Van Beijeren's work.

The execution is entirely in keeping with Van Beijeren's high standard: the fish are built up of various fluently painted transparent layers. Brilliantly illuminated, the fish contrast spectacularly with the background, which is virtually pitch black, while the brightly lit corner of the table contributes significantly to the illusion of space. Although the colouring of the fish initially appears to be limited, upon closer inspection it encompasses a profusion of hues from white, pink, and orange-pink to soft yellow. Numerous little highlights and bright accents yield a sparkling image. And, various details bear witness to Van Beijeren's evident joy in bringing in the finishing touch, for instance in the way he painted the two legs of the crab. **FGM**

23 Isaac van Duijnen (1628-1679/81)

Fish on the beach c. 1665

Oil on canvas, 121.5 x 172 cm. Signed lower right: I van Duijnen
Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, inv. no. 1326A

¹ For example, a slightly smaller pair (oil on canvas, 93.5 x 136 cm) in Cracow, Wawel Museum (one of which, in fact, may not be by Van Duijnen but a copy after Van Beijeren by a different hand), and a painting in the second sale of the Sedelmeyer collection, Paris, 25/28 May 1907, lot 11, ill. (oil on canvas, 103 x 157 cm, as by Van Beijeren, although Van Duijnen's signature was later found on it: the composition of this painting is very close to that of the Berlin painting exhibited here).

It takes only a few seconds to realise that Isaac van Duijnen's still life of fish on a beach has just as little, or even less, to do with reality as his still life of fish on a table (cat. no. 24). Indeed, these are all sea fish and marine creatures, but to find them on a beach neatly incised, or sliced and even presented in a strainer cannot fail to strike us as somewhat odd. The degree of realism evoked by Abraham van Beijeren's beach scene (cat. no. 19) is equal to the degree of artificiality of Van Duijnen's image. In contrast to Van Beijeren's realistic coastal scene, Van Duijnen presents the obligatory undulating waves under a massive cloudy sky with two almost apocalyptic-looking voids. While Van Beijeren appears to seek intimacy, Van Duijnen wishes to impress – and does just that very successfully. As a result, we are almost tempted to draw back from this massive cascade of fish.

This painting is surely a celebration of marine life. The artist did little to curb his enthusiasm about and fascination with the variety in size and shape of these creatures. However, his eagerness to portray each of them as distinctly as possible seems to have interfered with his ability to maintain unity in his composition. The detailed and powerful handling of the two incised haddock in the centre make them seem to advance visually even though they are situated at the back of the pile.

Similarly, the ray jumps out from under the massive sturgeon while the overturned crab to the right, and the three plaice to the left are also clamouring for attention. There are oysters to the left, mussels and cockles in a bucket to the right, and a nautilus shell in the centre. The latter is as alien to the scene as the sliced fish in the strainer, for it is a polished example, a costly collector's item, and what is more, not a product of the North Sea. Moreover, oysters would only be shucked at the time of their consumption. Strewing them on the beach in this fashion would be imprudent.

While Van Duijnen did not temper his choice of motifs here, he did just that with respect to his palette. He included some small red accents, along with a blue-grey cloth, but the overall tonality is determined by the browns and greys. Presumably partly due to the size of the painting, Van Duijnen's execution is fairly painterly. It is interesting to observe how he rendered the light on the body of the sturgeon by means of tamponing with a rather dry, coarse brush.

Isaac van Duijnen painted several similar large still lifes of fish on a beach – some closer to Van Beijeren's example than others, but each distinctly recognisable as his work and displaying at least a few of the characteristics mentioned here.¹ FGM



24 Isaac van Duijnen (1628-1679/81)

Still life of sea fish on a table c. 1670

Oil on canvas, 84 x 115 cm. Signed lower left: Ivan duijnen

Art dealers Hoogsteder & Hoogsteder, The Hague; private collection, Europe

Isaac van Duijnen must have been the most important supplier of fish still lifes to the Hague art market from the late 1650s until his death some two decades later. In his native Dordrecht, he had concentrated on painting freshwater fish, but in The Hague, he adopted Abraham van Beijeren's style and that artist's choice of subject, sea fish.

This display of sea food is unlikely to be that of a fishmonger, nor does the scene unequivocally conjure up a kitchen. The ornamental base of the table and the conspicuous blue cloth suggest that this image is a display in its own right, if not an assemblage specifically composed as a work of art. In fact, these particular motifs are more at home in a sumptuous still life, rather than in a down-to-earth fish piece. Van Duijnen was fond of the ornamental table base, for it occurs in many of his fish still lifes as well as in his earlier fruit pieces. The blue colour of the cloth is a deliberate choice intended to counterbalance the vibrant red of the sliced salmon in the other half of the picture.

Although clearly inspired by Van Beijeren, Van Duijnen's paintings would never be mistaken as works by that master. His use of sometimes

dominating primary colours, like the blue and the red in this painting, differs considerably from Van Beijeren's palette, in which colours are generally attuned to each other. Moreover, Van Beijeren's compositions tend to be fluent and harmonious, while Van Duijnen's are usually less organised and more angular. For example, the dramatic effect Van Duijnen achieved in this painting by brightly illuminating the large brill or turbot to the right, thus cutting it off from the rest of the composition by its own sharp side fin, is something Van Beijeren would certainly have eschewed.

Van Duijnen most likely composed this still life with the aid of studies of individual fish. Several of them occur very similarly in other works by the artist and one wonders whether he privileged the pictorial effect over the correct dimensions of the fish in respect to each other: the haddock at the back appears to be exceptionally large, for example, while the sturgeon seems to be on the small side. These discrepancies, however, in no way detract from the impressive composition. **FGM**



25 Pieter Verbeeck (active 1663-in or after 1674)

Still life of two haddock, plaice and mussels 1674

Oil on canvas, 66.5 x 83 cm. Signed and dated lower centre: P. Verbeeck 1674

Private collection, Amsterdam

¹ The painting, oil on canvas, 65 x 85 cm, was noted in Van Gelder 1943. This led Bergström 1956, pp. 234-236 (and already in the Swedish edition of 1947) to suggest that Verbeeck must have been Van Beijeren's teacher. Bernström & Rapp 1957, pp. 35-40, followed by Gerson 1958, made more sense of Verbeeck's status and biography.

² Oil on panel, 66.5 x 53 cm, inv. no. RF1946-24.

³ See Bernström & Rapp 1957. The four works are: (1) oil on canvas, 106.5 x 89 cm (the one without the haddock), sale London (Christie's), 6 July 1934, lot 104; (2) oil on canvas, 59.5 x 79 cm, sale London (Christie's), 6 February 1976, lot 27; (3) the painting exhibited here; (4) presumably the one mentioned in note 1.

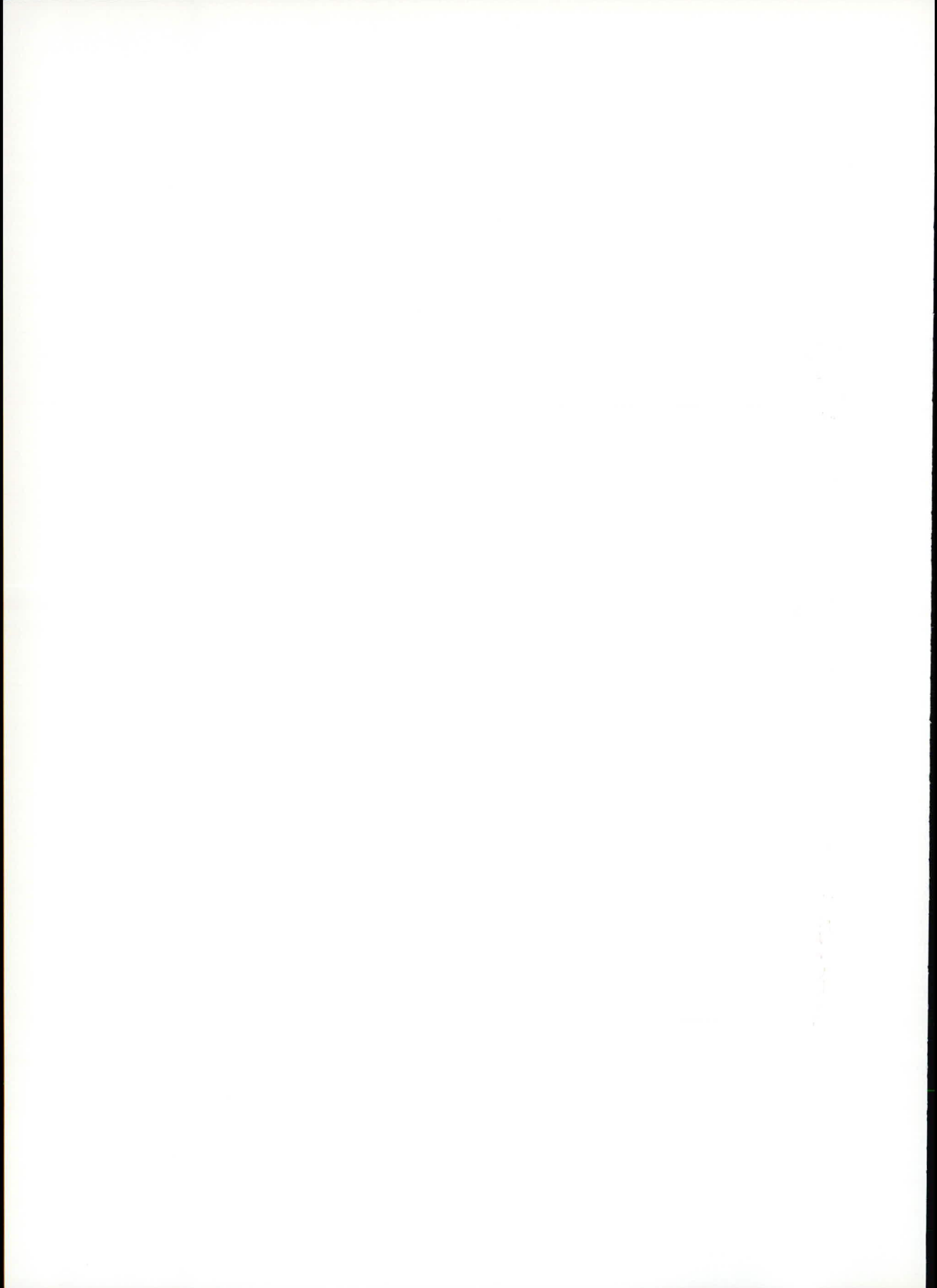
⁴ See note 1. Gerson's fig. 4, in my view, is not up to the standard of Verbeeck's work as we now know it on the basis of the paintings by him that have since surfaced.

For some time, Pieter Verbeeck was thought to have been the teacher of Abraham van Beijeren, since the date on his then only known still life of fish was read as 1634. Its style is, indeed, reminiscent of that of Van Beijeren, who embarked on his artistic career in the 1630s.¹ In truth, however, the painting is dated 1674 and is based on works by Van Beijeren's follower Isaac van Duijnen. In fact, several of Verbeeck's still lifes paraphrase Van Duijnen's works to such a degree that he must have worked in Van Duijnen's workshop and under his guidance.

Verbeeck's earliest known work, a still life of little fish, a lobster and a crab in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Valenciennes, is dated 1666.² Verbeeck was admitted as a *camerschilder* (decorative painter) to the guild in The Hague in 1663, thus the painting in Valenciennes was made about three years later. It reflects the influence of artists such as Pieter de Putter and Johannes Kuveenis. Curiously, Verbeeck appears only to have become inspired by the work of Van Duijnen somewhat later (after 1666), even though the latter had settled in the Hague as early as or before 1657. With the exception of the painting in Valenciennes, the only date that occurs on Verbeeck's fish still lifes is 1674, appearing

on four works, one of which is the painting on view here. An identical pair of haddock feature as the most important motif in three of them. Two such fish occur very similarly in the work of Van Duijnen.³ Without their signatures, most of Verbeeck's four 1674 works could easily be mistaken for paintings by Isaac van Duijnen, reminding one of the story of the treasurer Van der Does, who was tricked into buying a work by one of Van Duijnen's 'worst disciples' instead of the real thing (see pp. 15 and 72). Likewise, Horst Gerson confused a painting by a lesser pupil or follower with one by Verbeeck in his short article on this master in 1958.⁴

No matter how modest, the oeuvre of an artist such as Pieter Verbeeck makes several things clear. First, his work is a wonderful example of how seventeenth-century artists could influence or borrow from each other's work without this being perceived as a problem. And, second, that so-called minor masters were capable of producing work that can easily be mistaken for that of better-known masters. Unfortunately, we are not in treasurer Van der Does' position: he could simply visit the artist and ask him if he had actually painted the work in question. **FGM**



NORTHERN NETHERLANDS
UTRECHT



26 Attributed to **Marcus Ormea** (active before 1611-1636), the background possibly by **Claes Cornelisz. van Wieringen** (before 1577-1633)
Fish on a beach, with the Miraculous draft of fishes c. 1625-1630

Oil on canvas, 117 x 168.5 cm

Bruges, Openbaar Centrum voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn, inv. no. O.S. 116.1

¹ After an earlier, obviously incorrect attribution to David Teniers, the painting in Bruges was given to Willem Ormea and Adam Willaerts.

² On this and other paintings presented to the hospital, see Bok 1984; for the Ormea family, *ibidem*, pp. 74-81.

³ I am grateful to my colleagues Marijke de Kinkelder and Sabine Giepmans for confirming my ideas on this point.

⁴ Peter, in any case, was painted over the wave he is crossing for its highlight shines right through his leg.

This magnificent painting of fish near a beach may be considered one of the earliest known examples of its type. The fish are reminiscent of those in the work of the Utrecht artist Willem Ormea, but are rendered with substantially greater accuracy and skill than any of that artist's known works.¹ They are real fish, as opposed to the rather stiff, almost caricatural depiction of the animals in Willem Ormea's early, somewhat primitive works. Moreover, the artist's earliest known dated work is from 1634, while the style of the coastal scene of the present painting suggests that it must have originated in the second half of the 1620s. Willem Ormea usually included a number of seashells in his compositions, but the scintillating effect of the profusion of shells, small sea creatures and grains of sand is alien to his work. The clever way in which the basket and the suspended fishing nets are used as coulisses between the foreground and background also exceeds Willem's compositional ability.

Marcus Ormea, Willem's father and probable teacher, also painted fish, but to date not a single work can be given to him with any certainty. However, in 1628 he did donate a painting to the Hospital of St Job in Utrecht described as 'a view of the beach by the sea, having in front all sorts of salt- and freshwater fish'.² Thus, we know that he painted fish during the 1620s and because of the stylistic relationship of the Bruges painting with the works of Willem Ormea it is conceivable that

Marcus Ormea was the maker of this fish still life. Given its size and detailed quality, we may assume that this picture was painted on commission and for a substantial fee, rather than haphazardly for the market. Since the description of Marcus Ormea's 1628 painting mentions both salt- and freshwater fish, the present painting (with only sea fish) cannot be the missing work from St Job's Hospital. Unfortunately, no other work by the same hand can be singled out from the seventeenth-century Dutch fish still lifes known to us today.

Given the difference in the manner of painting, the beach scene in the background with the Miraculous draft of fishes (John 21:4-8) must be by a different hand than the still life of fish in the foreground. Assuming that this is a Utrecht work – as intimated by the fish still life – the obvious choice of an artist for the coastal view would be a member of the Willaerts family. Nevertheless, the style of this background points in another direction, and is close to that of the Haarlem painters Cornelis Verbeeck (before 1570-in or after 1637) and Claes Cornelisz. van Wieringen, close enough to the latter, in fact, to warrant a tentative attribution to him.³ The slender figures of Christ and the onlookers, however, are not typical of either artist. Perhaps they were added by a third hand soon after the painting was completed to add iconographical depth to the scene.⁴ FGM



27 Unknown artist, Utrecht?

Study of various fish c. 1640

Oil on panel, 37.9 x 50.5 cm. Inscribed lower right [inv. no.?]: 157[.]

Private collection, Madrid

¹ The number inscribed at the lower right suggests that it was once part of a substantial collection.

This intriguing depiction of fish raises a number of questions, most of which unfortunately remain unanswered for the time being. What is not problematic is the identification of the fish, including both salt- and freshwater species. One of them is a smoked herring, and the whiting and the bull rout are depicted upside-down. This would seem to indicate that the painting is not an actual biological study, although in comparison with proper fish still lifes the fish have been rendered somewhat stiffly and analytically. As such, they seem more akin to the fish illustrated in biological studies, for instance the one by Johannes Jonston (cat. no. 66). The relative sizes of the fish appear to have been observed quite accurately, though the perch and plaice at the lower right seem to be on the small side. Differences in details of the fins suggest that the two plaice (the one at lower left and the one on its back in the centre of the picture) were painted from different models.

One might think that this panel was made as decoration for a fish shop, but this is not very likely since fish was sold mainly in the open

air – at the market or from fixed fish stalls – which would not require such embellishment.

Authorship of this painting also remains undetermined. Although it has been in Spain since time immemorial, the overall handling and atmosphere suggests a Northern Netherlandish origin.¹ Since the presentation of the fish is quite different from that in fish still lifes proper, however, there is virtually no comparative material that could lead to an attribution. While the fish have been depicted quite faithfully, this does not mean that the painting is the work of a specialised fish painter. The only such artist whose fish are somewhat reminiscent of those in this panel is Willem Ormea (cf. cat. no. 31 and figs. 30-32, pp. 47 and 48). This might suggest a Utrecht origin – influenced by Marcus and Willem Ormea – and a date around 1640. Unfortunately, a definitive placement of this panel is impeded by its very uniqueness. Hopefully its exposure in this catalogue and exhibition will shed some light on this issue. **FGM**



28 Jan de Bont (active 1641-1653)

Still life of fish with a view of the beach 1643

Oil on canvas, 135 x 151.5 cm. Signed and dated lower left: JDBont '43 f

Utrecht, Centraal Museum, inv. no. 10754

¹ Haak 1984, fig. 20, p. 34. The lottery included several pieces by De Bont himself, and their descriptions reveal that he produced different types of still life, such as 'a painting of a ham with a tall pewter tankard' (Obreen 1877-1890, vol. 2, p. 82, no. 7). Works like this by him are presently unknown.

² The signature JDBont is completely legible, while the date is less distinct. The numerals 4 and 3, preceded by what appears to be a 'f', and followed by a slanting 'f' are unmistakable. Their wide spacing is unusual, but in view of De Bont's dates '43 is the only possible reading.

³ Bok 1984, pp. 29-30. From the documents it is unclear whether De Bont presented his painting to the hospital in 1639 or 1641. See the remarks on De Bont's figures and group portrait under cat. no. 30.

Neither Jan de Bont nor his work are well known and, in fact, he has often been omitted in the specialised literature on still-life painting. The artist's name and an illustration of this painting were included in a major standard work on Dutch seventeenth-century painting primarily because he organised a lottery in 1649 for which he made fairly detailed descriptions of the paintings to be won.¹ The three paintings by De Bont included in the present catalogue, however, afford ample testimony of his artistic qualities. Not only do they display the high quality of his work and the variety of his subject matter – even within the realm of fish painting – they also manifest his originality.

The date on this painting is somewhat indistinct and was long seen as 1653, but upon closer inspection '43 would appear to be the correct reading.² At this time in Utrecht fish still lifes on a beach generally emulated the works of Willem Ormea with backgrounds by a member of the Willaerts family: horizontal displays of fish before a beach or coastal view taking up the full width of the painting. De Bont, however, produced more intimate compositions. He piled up his fish, almost entirely filling the triangle below the diagonal dividing the picture plane from the lower left to the upper right. Moreover, he isolated the viewer and the fish, as it were, by means of a wooden partition that takes up half of the

background. A young boy with a pole across his shoulder appears to have just walked onto the beach from behind the fencing and seems to be sizing up the viewer. Behind him is an airy view of a beach with some fishing vessels on the shore, fishermen unloading and perhaps offering their catch, and a few figures atop a dune, one of whom – possibly a prospective buyer – points at the scene.

Even were we to doubt the early date of origin of 1643 and maintain 1653 (the year of De Bont's death) for this work, it still precedes better-known beach scenes of this type by artists such as Abraham van Beijeren and Isaac van Duijnen (see cat. nos. 19 and 23). Notwithstanding De Bont's use of a rather broad brush in a work of this size, his rendering of the fish is absolutely accurate. The subtle colour variations of the fish add to the quality of the composition. The brownish tonality of the haddock, the silvery blue of the cod and the soft orangey-pink of the halibut are combined with some richer blue and red touches on the crab and lobster, thus preventing the painting from becoming entirely tonal.

The young boy is evidence of De Bont's skills as a figure painter. While no figure paintings by the artist are now known, he did give a work representing 'Job and his friends' to the St Job's Hospital around 1640.³ FGM



29 Jan de Bont (active 1641-1653)

Sea fish on a table 1650

Oil on panel, 56 x 74 cm. Signed and dated lower left: JDBont 1650 (JDB in monogram)

N.J. Oppenheimer collection, Sweden

In this still life, Jan de Bont included six herring next to a mound of haddock and a basket of plaice. Although herring was the Dutch fishing fleet's most important product – it was even claimed that herring kept the national economy strong – they are rarely prominently included in fish still lifes. This may be because they were usually gutted and put in barrels before being brought ashore. Still, they must have been available in individual portions at the market, much like other fish.

Contrary to custom, De Bont's herring are not gutted. As such, it is all the more surprising to find them in a painting by an artist working in Utrecht, where fresh sea fish was more difficult to come by because of the longer supply route than in coastal areas. Nevertheless, De Bont's fish do indeed look fresh, and not only the herring, but the haddock and the plaice as well. The plaice on top of the basket even seems to be curling up, although it is not likely to be alive. Its pose is reminiscent of the way in which larger flatfish, such as turbot, were often depicted

with a piece of string between their mouth and tail. Plaice are regularly presented in a basket with some straw, which was probably intended to keep them from sticking to one another and perhaps to absorb excess moisture.

Despite the limitations of his subject – few fish with few colours – De Bont produced a powerful image largely due to his highly effective rendering of light. Much of the image is kept in relative darkness, but the three haddock in front reflect a strong, clear light from their glistening scales. The same light bathes the foremost three herring. The haddock are in apparent disarray, but it is precisely this that allowed the artist to show the fish in a variety of poses. The same is true for the herring; in effect, the painter pulled the same trick again, this time on a smaller scale. The basket of plaice in the background gives height to his composition, with the fish at the top sharing the bright light that also shines on the haddock and herring. **FGM**



30 Jan de Bont (active 1641-1653)

A fish seller in her shop c. 1650

Oil on canvas, 107.5 x 180.3 cm. Signed upper right: JDBont (JDB in monogram)

Voorschoten, Duivenvoorde Foundation

¹ Oil on canvas, 63.5 x 76.2 cm, signed and dated 1651, sale New York (Christie's), 16 January 1992, lot 68, colour ill. The conspicuous church spire in the landscape may well have been included to remind the viewer of the fact that these fish are God's gift to mankind.

² *Family posing on the beach*, oil on canvas, 95.2 x 130.2 cm, present location unknown. The painting was recorded in a sale in London (Christie's), 12 December 1863, lot 66, and reappeared in a sale in New York (Christie's), 14 January 1993, lot 79, colour ill., where it was noted that the figures appeared to be by a different hand. Comparing the handling of the faces, hands and fabrics with the paintings by De Bont exhibited here, however, it seems safe to assume that he was also responsible for the portrait figures in this work.

This previously unpublished painting is here entitled 'A fish seller in her shop'. Naturally, this is no more than an interpretation of the scene. There are no actual indications of trade being conducted in this setting, which also does not appear to be a kitchen. But, rather than actively handling the fish around her, this woman appears to be waiting for customers. And also the view of a quay and the sea in the distance sooner suggests fishing and fish trade than culinary activities.

The selection of fish in this painting is quite common. We see the often exhibited sea fish, such as cod and whiting, ray and various flat fish. Hanging at the back are some dried fish and the woman holds a tub of freshwater fish in front of her with predominantly pike and bream. A few small bream appear to have slipped out of it onto the table. In 1651, Jan de Bont painted a still life in which a similar tub of river fish is the central motif, with a view of a river landscape through a window in the background.¹ We may wonder whether De Bont allowed the cat, at the far left, to sneak into the picture purely to enliven it, or perhaps to warn the viewer against some vice it may represent, such as greed or thievery.

The woman presenting this abundance of fish strikes a pose as if posing for her portrait. Her likeness, though, is most probably no more or less an actual portrait than that of the boy in De Bont's fish still life on a beach (cat. no. 28). Her left arm appears to have been added as an afterthought: the paint has become slightly transparent and reveals that the artist initially painted the landscape background and the window sill, and only later introduced the arm, which in fact has turned out somewhat too large and bulky. De Bont may well have used models for both the woman and the boy, perhaps even family members, since their features are remarkably similar. The figures in both paintings are helpful in confirming De Bont's authorship of an unsigned family portrait. That lively, genre-like portrait of a family engaged with a catch of fish on a beach had traditionally been attributed to De Bont, but with some uncertainty concerning the authorship of the figures.² This can now be assumed with greater confidence. FGM



31 Willem Ormea (active 1634-1673)

Fish on a dune c. 1650-1660

Oil on canvas, 70 x 103 cm. Signed lower right: W ORMEA F

M. H. Sterrenburg collection, Amsterdam

¹ Compare the 1638 painting in Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-A 1789, and the one in Utrecht, Centraal Museum, inv. no. 2325.

This is a typical example of Willem Ormea's many paintings of fish in a coastal landscape. In view of the quality of the execution, it is a later work by the artist, perhaps from the 1650s. Ormea's early paintings tend to be rather stiff.¹ The colouring and the slight naiveté of the handling of the fish make this an attractive decorative work.

Because of its repetitiveness, the work of Willem Ormea would not lend itself to a one-man exhibition. Apparently he never tired of painting the same type of image year after year. With few exceptions, his compositions present fish displayed on the coast, like the present painting, and the fish seem to have generally been derived from a limited number of studies kept in his studio. The large cod seen here, for example, reappears in a fair number of his works, just as the head of a haddock to the left, and the almost caricatural gurnard to the right. Even though it is placed behind the other fish, the cod dominates the composition because of its size. This imposing fish, in fact, interferes somewhat with the sense of depth. Crabs – large and small – and seashells are also

part of Ormea's standard repertoire. In so far as they can be identified, the larger shells, like those in the work of many other painters of fish still lifes, come from faraway places and not the North Sea or the North Atlantic, as might be expected. Ormea devoted special attention to the sturgeon here, which while recurring in other paintings by the artist, is never shown so prominently. He clearly tried to render the animal's impressive plates and scutes accurately, juxtaposing them with the enormous crab's plating.

The coastal view in the background of many of Ormea's paintings was painted by a member of the Willaerts family, who specialised in this field (see also pp. 46-49). Here, too, Ormea's share is most likely limited to the area of the dune upon which the fish are spread out. The background appears to be the work of a different hand, though it is not up to the Willaerts' quality. It does provide a sense of atmosphere and setting, but as a seascape it is quite indiscriminate. As a result, Ormea's ensemble of sea fish now commands our full attention. **FGM**



32 Willem Ormea (active 1634-1673) (attributed to)

Fish piled up near a fence c. 1650

Oil on canvas, 80 x 120 cm

Private collection, Amsterdam

The Utrecht artist Abraham Bloemaert barely painted or drew any fish at all, let alone a still life of fish. Nevertheless, the work on view here appears to have been influenced by Bloemaert to a certain degree. Swaying branches with few leaves occur frequently in his oeuvre, and constructions consisting of coarsely worked wood, like the fence here, also enjoyed his particular interest. The fish in this painting are also somewhat reminiscent of those by Willem Ormea although the maker of this work opted for a composition that is livelier than Ormea's horizontal arrays and also includes some freshwater fish, which are not found in Ormea's work. The composition itself seems to anticipate some of Jacob Gillig's still lifes of fish in the open air (see cat. no. 36). All in all, we may safely assume that this work was either painted by an unknown artist in the Utrecht area or one with strong Utrecht connections. While not the work of a major master, the painting's sheer simplicity and slight naiveté afford it considerable charm.

The vista unfolding behind the fence in the distance could be of the grey-white sea; however the vegetation suggests a location further inland than the top of a dune. The choice of fish appears to have been adapted to this ambiguous situation, even though the salt water aspect dominates in this respect. At the front are a carp and a chub, but these freshwater fish are in the minority compared to the abundant sea creatures, which include some plaice, haddock, oysters, mussels and a large seashell. The shell is a *Strombus gigas*, a species from the West Indies, and no less a collector's item than the two pieces of red coral from the Mediterranean Sea occupying a prominent place in front of the large haddock. Although this could be a case of overinterpretation, the painting may almost be considered an image of an ideal situation: the riches of the water at hand, we are nevertheless safe and sound on dry land. **FGM**



33 Jacob Gillig (c. 1636-1701)

River fish and nets in a niche 1669

Oil on canvas, 79 x 66 cm. Signed and dated lower right: Jacobus.Gilligh.fecit. A° 1669

N.J. Oppenheimer collection, Sweden

Jacob Gillig produced many paintings of fish on a table or in a niche, of which this is a characteristic example. Rather than actually lying on the table, most of the fish hang above it from the lines with which they were caught. They are reminiscent of the festoons of flowers and/or fruit that were a popular subject at the time: Abraham Mignon was producing such works in Utrecht just when Gillig was painting this kind of fish still life in the same town. At first sight, though, Gillig's fish seem to be being poured from an opening onto the tabletop.

Gillig clearly presents his fish as a fresh catch: hanging from a fishing line, in front of a large, round fish basket, and draped upon some fishing nets. The net in the centre appears to be a type that could be drawn closed by pulling it inside-out through the round opening. Similar nets occur frequently in the master's compositions (see cat. no. 35), but not in works by other artists. Possibly to emphasise the freshness of the fish, Gillig placed some water plants in the pile. Yet several of the fish have already been scored, probably to allow the flesh to release its

moisture, which suggests kitchen activity. The artist most likely never intended to present a realistic situation, but rather an idealised impression of fish just caught and ready to be prepared for consumption.

Gillig has depicted some intestines in the middle of his pile, perhaps from the perch directly above, with a fly sitting on top of them. This insect is often included in still lifes as a symbol of decay and transience, for example in flower and game pieces. Gillig is the only fish still-life painter to include a fly so prominently in several of his compositions, particularly of the type shown here. Thus, unlike his colleagues, he seems to have intended a degree of *vanitas* symbolism. Directly under the fly is a pair of swim bladders, an organ the fish fills with air which allows it to control the depth at which it swims. Its function must have been known by the artist: the fact that he shows the swim bladders so conspicuously, in the mostly brightly lit section of his painting, means that he either was fascinated by its function or shape and colour, or assigned it a role in his *vanitas* symbolism that escapes us now. FGM



34 Jacob Gillig (c. 1636-1701)

Still life of fish with a cauldron 1678

Oil on panel, 47 x 67.5 cm. Signed and dated lower left: J: Gillig. f 1678

Utrecht, Centraal Museum, inv. no. 7163

This painting is somewhat exceptional within Jacob Gillig's oeuvre. The focal point in the majority of his compositions are usually a few large, distinctly recognisable fish surrounded by smaller ones and other paraphernalia (see cat. nos. 33, 35 and 36). Moreover, many of his compositions strike one as a pointed 'pyramid' or a 'waterfall' of fish. Here, in contrast, the central focus is on both the big brass cauldron and the large, gutted and partially sliced fish, which cannot be positively identified. This body may belong to the pike, whose head – sticking out from under it – we only notice upon closer scrutiny. The way in which the pike's head has been placed eye-to-eye with a small roach comes across as comical, even though the artist may not have intended this as such.

Gillig here, thus, abandoned his usual triangular piling up of the fish. Instead, the composition consists of an arrangement of objects from the upper left to the lower right that gradually diminish in size, beginning with the majestic brass kettle and ending with the small ruff in the lower right corner. As in most of Gillig's paintings, here too the

smaller fish – perch, ruff and some roaches – complete the composition. Gillig has done a wonderful job in rendering the cauldron: the scoured brass, the crack in its rim and the worn nails with which the handle has been attached, are entirely convincing. The visual interaction between the warm yellow reflections of the brass and the cool silver sparkle of the fish can almost be regarded as the theme of the painting. While the background is primarily dark, the kettle and the fish host a lively play of light. Additionally, Gillig provided some subtle red accents by means of specks of blood and fins.

The exact location of this scene is not entirely clear. The objects in the background – a wicker bottle, some barrels and a broom – could suggest a larder, but the cauldron, the knife, the handle (probably) of a skimmer and the fish being prepared for consumption more readily suggest a kitchen. But why would the fish be placed on a board on the floor, rather than on a counter? Were we able to ask Jacob Gillig himself, he most likely would not be able to provide a satisfactory answer. **FGM**



35 Jacob Gillig (c. 1636-1701)

Still life of fish and fishing gear outside a shed 1684

Oil on canvas, 67 x 78.5 cm. Signed and dated lower right: J. Gillig f / 1684

Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, inv. no. 1235

¹ Oil on canvas, 67.5 cm x 88.5 cm, signed and dated 1665, Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum, inv. no. 4066.

The earliest known examples of Jacob Gillig's paintings of freshwater fish in a landscape are dominated by the landscape, as in a 1665 work in Budapest.¹ It has been suggested that in these instances Gillig collaborated with a specialised landscape painter, however no such artist has yet been identified. Perhaps Gillig was simply a more talented landscapist than we give him credit for. Whatever the case may be, in the following years the artist focused increasingly on the fish and the landscape assumed secondary importance, which at times was nevertheless considerable.

In this painting from 1684 the fish are, indeed, the central motif. They are clearly presented as a fresh catch still partly entangled in waterweeds. They lie in front of a shed, perhaps that of a fisherman, together with a bunch of nets and a fishing rod, complete with its float and fishing line. Even though one would hardly encounter such a display in the Dutch countryside (and how Dutch is this spot with hills and even mountains in the distance?), at first sight the combination of seemingly untouched freshwater fish strikes us as realistic. But, naturally, the image

has been carefully crafted: Gillig introduced his well-trying pyramidal composition, piling the fish up criss-cross, parallel to the diagonals of the picture plane, the largest fish – a big perch – in the middle and the smaller fish to the sides.

In the landscape in the background, which was most likely painted by Gillig himself, a man can be observed sitting near a stream having cast his fishing line and patiently waiting for the fish to bite. A man with a fishing rod crosses the bridge and a woman and a child stroll on the opposite bank. These figures may well represent a degree of unacceptable idleness, for fishing was often associated with laziness (see p. 105). Alternately, the lavish display of fish in the foreground combined with the angler by the stream could serve to admonish the viewer to do his fishing properly and diligently, for then he will be rewarded with a fine catch. Thus, this image can also be interpreted metaphorically: those who lead a virtuous life will be rewarded by God. **FGM**



36 Jacob Gillig (c. 1636-1701)

Still life of sea fish near a beach 1687

Oil on canvas, 78.4 x 66.6 cm. Signed and dated upper left: J. Gillig f / 1687

Utrecht, Centraal Museum, inv. no. 2517

Jacob Gillig's earliest paintings are strongly reminiscent of those by his Utrecht predecessor Willem Ormea (cat. no. 31). He soon veered away from such displays of fish on a beach with a coastal view in the background, evincing a preference for intimate arrangements of freshwater fish, which generally are smaller than sea fish. He regularly returned to the subject of sea fish, however, and the work on view here is one of the most successful of its kind. It is also one of Gillig's larger vertical canvasses. In view of its unusual subject and size, one wonders whether it was painted on commission, perhaps as a pendant to a still life of freshwater fish. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to support either suggestion.

Even though the sea fish are situated near a beach, the image is again quite unrealistic, more so than Gillig's early examples and most of his displays of freshwater fish. In fact, the little speckled fish in the foreground is not a sea fish at all, but a ruffe, with a large spiky dorsal fin.

Above all, it would be most curious to find a basket of slices of fish and fish guts on a beach, as these more properly belonged in a fish stall or, likelier still, in a kitchen, while oysters should only be shucked when about to be consumed, and not for display on the sand. Whatever the case may be, Gillig exerted all of his talent in painting the silvery, scaly skin of the big haddock, which commands most of the attention in this painting. It is wonderful testimony of Gillig's love of his subject. Moreover, the colouring of this beach scene is noticeably softer and cooler than that of Gillig's paintings of freshwater fish in which, in addition to their silver tones, fairly dark browns and greens predominate.

In the background of this still life a fisherman has spread out four large fish (almost as big as the fisherman himself) on the beach at the feet of an elegant urban couple. His wife on his arm, the gentleman points to one of the fish with his walking stick, while the tired-looking fisherman drags on yet several more for their perusal. **FGM**



37 Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588-1629)

The merry drinker c. 1625

Canvas, 71.4 x 59.8 cm. Signed and indistinctly dated upper right: HHTB 16[.]

Utrecht, Centraal Museum, inv. no. 11480

¹ Jansen 1986-1987, pp. 116-118 (no. 16); Helmus 1999, vol. A, pp. 162-164.

² Jansen 1986-1987, p. 116.

³ See also cat. no. 39 and Weber 1987.

⁴ *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche taal*, vol. XII, col. 992-993. Gudlaugsson 1945, pp. 58-59; Haverkamp Begemann 1959, pp. 61-62 (cat. no. I), and pp. 96-99 (cat. nos. 27 and 28); Slive 1970-1974, vol. I, pp. 34-36, 94-96, and vol. III, pp. 3-4, 39-41 (cat. nos. 5, 64 and 65).

Hendrick ter Brugghen's masterly depiction of a man of the people, with a stoneware beer tankard in one hand and a partially eaten pickled herring in the other, is entitled *The merry drinker*, although the merriness in question seems suspiciously like drunkenness.¹ The clothing worn by this man – the sagging red doublet with broad black panel and the cap with an enormous white ostrich feather – may be described as characteristic of the fashion launched by the paintings of the Utrecht Caravagists; his bare shoulder is also typical of this trend. The origins of Ter Brugghen's theatrical type – the 'rough, tough guy' – lie in Italy, in the circle of Caravaggio; Gerard van Honthorst was responsible for importing it to Utrecht, around 1623.²

The two kinds of refreshment that Ter Brugghen has allocated his character, fish and drink, a combination also encountered in similar depictions by other Utrecht artists, appear at first sight to contain the

simple message that eating salted herring makes one thirsty. In this instance the figure's thirst must have been fairly fierce.³ However, there may be more going on in the painting. It is possible – and this is pure speculation – that Ter Brugghen was attempting to use the figure's drunken appearance and the crumpled herring to create a specific connection or evoke an association with a character who played a leading role in burlesque theatre and during the carnival season, the buffoon known as 'Pekelharing' (Pickled Herring). Representations of this comic figure, in paintings by artists such as Willem Buytewech and Frans Hals and his followers among others, display the usual variations in attire and appearance; some have a tankard as an attribute, others are festooned with sausage and herring.⁴ With respect to its *habitus*, Ter Brugghen's *Merry drinker* seems to fit readily in the range of 'Pekelharing' depictions. EdeJ



38 Christiaan van Couwenbergh (1604-1667)

Man with herring 1655

Canvas, 77.5 x 58.5 cm. Monogrammed and dated: C.F. 1655

Bonn, Rheinisches Landesmuseum, inv. no. 69.0160

¹ Raupp 1984, pp. 321-322.

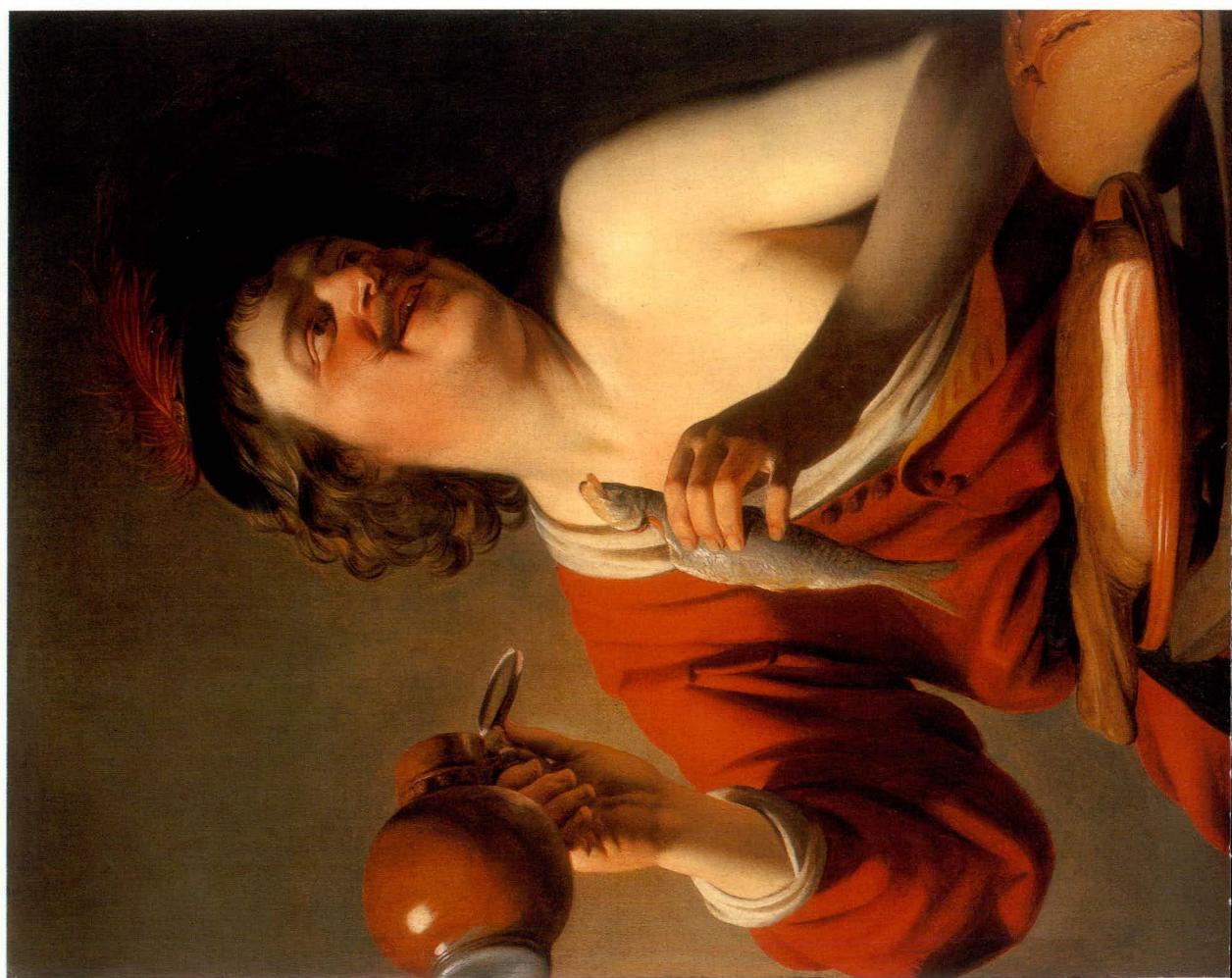
² Maier Preusker 1991, pp. 184 and 218 (no. A53). The same figure was portrayed by Van Couwenbergh as a cockler; see Ger Luijten in Amsterdam 1997, p. 239, ill. 5.

³ De Jongh 2003-2004, p. 116.

This painting of a grinning man with a knife and herring was long thought to be a self-portrait of Christiaan van Couwenbergh.¹ Tempting as it may be, justifiable doubt has now arisen as to the validity of this identification, since there is no real evidence to support it.² For the time being *Man with herring* seems the most appropriate title. What is clear, however, is that the painter intended to create a humorous picture in a popular style, which art theory classified as *genus humile*, the lowest rung on the hierarchical ladder of the available repertoire. Nevertheless, Van Couwenbergh also had other aspirations, and a portion of his oeuvre even belongs to what was once considered the highest genre, namely history painting.

The roguish figure's provocative expression, his open shirt, the demonstrative, almost challenging way in which he holds the knife and herring, suggesting that the fish was rapidly slashed to pieces just

a few seconds before – all these disparate elements combine to endow the picture with enormous vitality. Other artists also portrayed figures displaying a herring with a greater or lesser degree of ostentation, but the meaning of these depictions is not always clear. In some instances, such as in the paintings of Jan Steen, the central message is unmistakably sexual. Whether this is the case in Van Couwenbergh's work is difficult to say, although the tobacco pipe in the man's hat could be an indication in this direction. Taking the art as evidence, once tobacco smoking was introduced into Holland, the custom quickly developed, at least in lower social circles, of keeping the pipe in one's hat or cap when not in use. This curious garb is found in many paintings of common folk, some distinctly shady in appearance, and often in an erotic context.³ EdeJ



39 Gerard van Honthorst (1592-1656)

The thirsty eater c. 1625-1630

Canvas, 85 x 69 cm. Signed: GHonthorst f

Private collection, Europe

¹ Judson & Ekkart 1999, *passim*.

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 186 (no. 234a); here tentatively attributed to Christiaan van Couwenbergh. Also given to Van Couwenbergh and dated to around 1635 in Maier-Preusker 1991, p. 179. However, that *The thirsty eater* was painted by Honthorst around 1625-1630 is difficult to doubt. R.E.O. Ekkart, co-author of Judson & Ekkart 1999, recently examined the painting and is entirely convinced of its autography. It will be published as a Honthorst by Fred G. Meijer in the *RKD Bulletin*.

⁴ See Kistemaker & Van Vilsteren 1994.

⁵ See also cat. no. 37. In 1634 Hendrick Bloemaert painted a similar figure with a herring and a tankard; see Roethlisberger & Bok 1993, pp. 467-468 (no. H55). Interesting insights on this subject and its context may be found in Weber 1987, where on pp. 130-131 and 133 the author discusses the herring as popular medicine, also in *sexualibus*.

⁶ De Vries & Van der Woude 1995, pp. 293-305. For Vondel and Jan Steen, see pp. 88 and 113 in this catalogue. See also the eloquent words of the historian Marcus Zuerius Boxhorn on the profitable fishing trade (1634), quoted by Weber 1987, pp. 129-130, and the ode 'Koning van de vissen' (King of fish), in Tysens c. 1715, pp. 18-19.

At a point when his career was well under way Gerard van Honthorst, originally from Utrecht, became a respected court painter in The Hague.

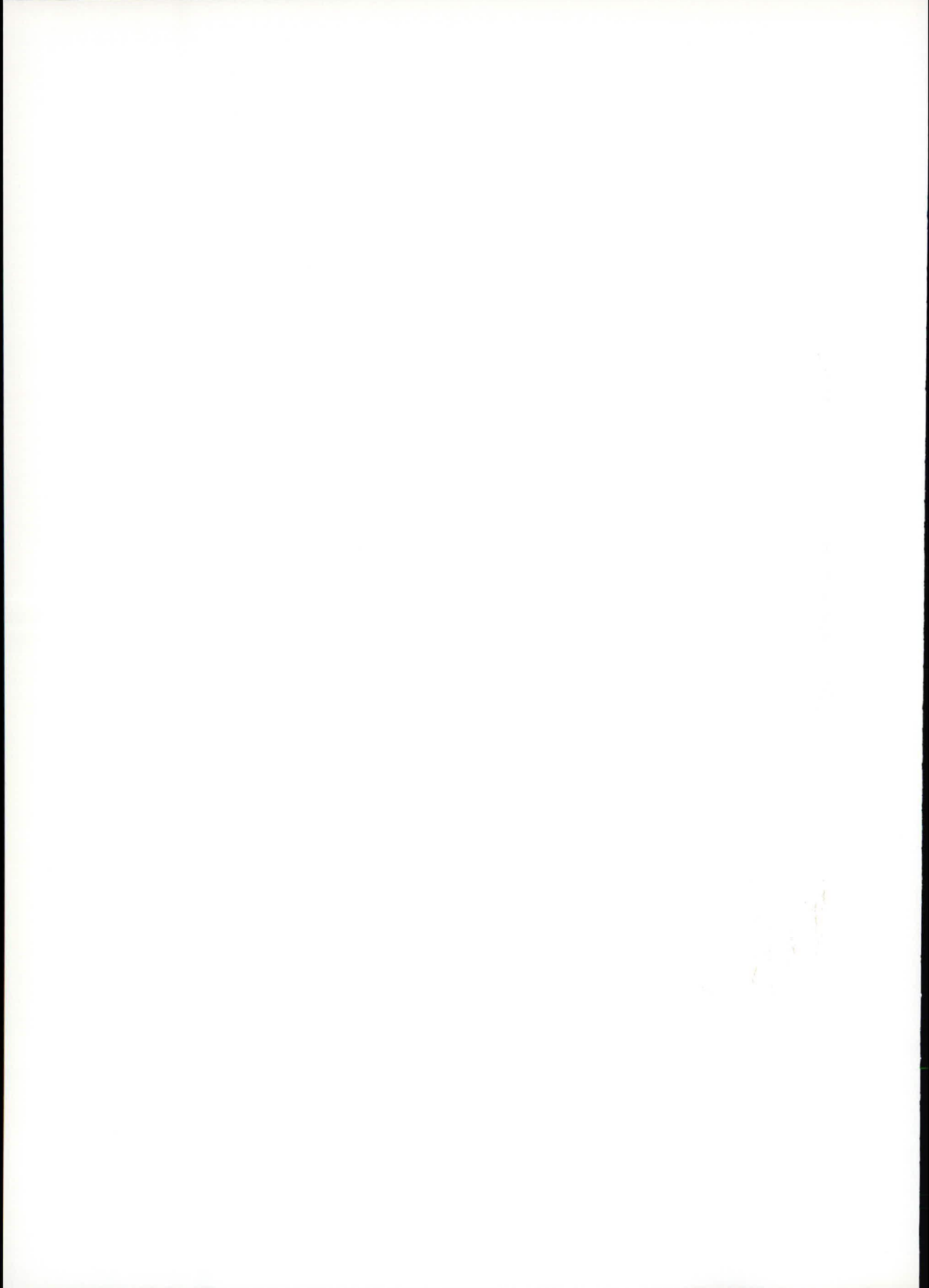
He painted many likenesses of Stadholder Frederik Hendrik and his family, and a number of individuals in the stadholder's entourage, producing both sober portraits as well as graceful *portraits historiés*, with his sitters playing a specific role or identified with an exemplary figure from history.¹

Honthorst did not start out as a portraitist. During the 1620s he belonged to the Utrecht Caravaggists, specialising in religious and mythological subjects. He also painted half-length figures, both male and female, with attributes such as a lute, violin or viola da gamba, a drinking glass or other object. The colourful garb donned by these figures is generally frivolous and theatrical, and thus very different from what the average Dutch burgher was accustomed to wearing.²

With his plumed cap and bare shoulder, as well as his merry expression, *The thirsty eater* fits perfectly in the genre.³ Although the modern title chiefly refers to the tankard that the man clutches in his right hand, and the foodstuffs represented, bread and ham, the figure's most important attribute is the herring that he holds up so conspicuously in his other hand.

Eating pickled herring makes one thirsty, and so it needs to be consumed along with something to drink, wine perhaps, but beer was most likely. During the seventeenth century beer was the most popular beverage in the Low Countries. Everyone drank it, both young and old, partly as a matter of necessity as the available water was generally unfit for consumption.⁴ Although quenching the thirst caused by pickled fish with beer was a commonplace activity, Honthorst and several of his Utrecht colleagues apparently considered this culinary combination sufficiently visually appealing to warrant its translation into an artistic motif.⁵

Herring was an extremely well-liked foodstuff in the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth century, and the herring fishing industry, which provided work for many thousands of people, was generally considered a pillar of the economy. Poets such as Vondel called herring the 'king of fish', although some wits, of whom Jan Steen was not the least, tended to regard it as a phallic symbol.⁶ Nevertheless, it is impossible to ascertain whether the herring held high by the merry man in Honthorst's painting, demanding the viewer's attention, was intended to introduce a sexual pun into the scene. **EdeJ**



NORTHERN NETHERLANDS

ALKMAAR, AMSTERDAM, DELFT, DORDRECHT, HAARLEM, HOORN, MIDDELBURG, ZWOLLE





40 Pieter van Schaeyenborgh (active 1635 [1610?]-in or after 1657)

Sea fish on a table 1656

Oil on canvas, 73.5 x 111 cm. Traces of a signature lower right
Private collection, Europe

Freshwater fish on a table 1657

Oil on canvas, 73 x 112 cm. Signed lower centre: Schaeyenborgh
Private collection, Europe

¹ See also pp. 58 and 71-72.

² The flatfish could equally be a flounder, which can be found quite far upstream.

These fish still life pendants are exceptional in more ways than one. They are most likely the only pair of Dutch seventeenth-century fish pieces whose history can be traced back to the moment when they were commissioned from the painter. This took place in or shortly before 1656. The patron was the wealthy Alkmaar burgher Johan van Nordingen the Younger (1625-1656), who most probably ordered the paintings to decorate the almshouse he had founded. This Provenhuis Van Nordingen was commonly called the 'Huis van Achten' (the house of eight) as it provided shelter to eight impoverished occupants, who also received alms in the form of money, food, beer and peat. Van Schaeyenborgh delivered the first of the two paintings, the still life of sea fish, to Van Nordingen in 1656 and was paid 48 guilders for it. In the following year, after Van Nordingen's death, Van Schaeyenborgh delivered the still life of freshwater fish to his patron's widow, for which he received 42 guilders. Very few contemporary prices for fish still lifes are known, but it would appear that Van Schaeyenborgh was well paid for these pieces.¹ To be sure, they are among the artist's largest and most detailed works and we must assume that, with a generous payment in sight, the painter did his utmost to satisfy his customer.

The fact that this pair has survived in almost pristine condition is doubtless due to their rather uneventful history: after being delivered to the Provenhuis, they hung there until 1875, when the regents gave them on long-term loan to the Alkmaar Municipal Museum. Nearly a

hundred years later, the loan was withdrawn and the paintings were put up for auction. On that occasion, the pair was separated: the sea fish went to a Dutch art dealer who held on to it until quite recently; the freshwater fish eventually ended up in the attic of a private collector. By sheer coincidence, the two paintings have recently been reunited after having been separated for over 25 years.

Pieter van Schaeyenborgh ranks among the best fish still-life painters in seventeenth-century Holland. Moreover, he is one of the very few who specialised in this genre: no other subjects by his hand are known. His oeuvre makes it clear that he preferred salt- to freshwater fish. The bigger, rounder bodies of, for example, haddock and cod, the range of flatfish and the large sea crabs enabled him to create a greater variety of combinations and compositions. Even in this still life of freshwater fish he could not resist including a flat sea fish, probably plaice, while the smelt – on the wooden dish to the right – occur in both brackish and fresh water.² As a striking accent, Van Schaeyenborgh placed some parsley – commonly used in fish recipes – between the containers of freshwater fish. He also included a fishing net in his composition. The fish is literally shown between being caught and being consumed. In both paintings, the artist seems to have had some difficulty with the three-dimensional rendering of the wooden buckets – one bound with metal bands, the other with osier. In contrast, his red earthenware strainers and baskets are very convincingly rendered with great attention to detail.

³ Compare the large pair by Johannes Fabritius, figs. 44 and 45, p. 60.

⁴ *Still life of a pair of herring on a dish*, oil on panel, 25.8 x 38.8 cm, signed, Dutch private collection, 1943 (photo at RKD).

Van Schaeyenborgh enhanced the depth in the painting of sea fish by placing some herring on a leaf of red cabbage on a barrel in front of the table. The same motif occurs in the work of Antwerp artists such as Alexander Adriaenssen. This may add some weight to the suggestion that the artist is identical with the Peeter Schaeyenborch who was recorded as a painter's pupil in the registers of the Antwerp guild in 1610.

The obvious choice of subject matter for a pair of fish still lifes would be one of sea fish and the other of freshwater fish, yet very few other examples of such pendants have been found.³ Given his preference for sea fish, Van Schaeyenborgh must have made this decision quite deliberately, or in this case have followed the suggestion of his patron. The two compositions are perfectly attuned to one another, with the central fish mirroring each other's positions and the fish in the strainers, though different in size, doing the same. Perhaps Van Schaeyenborgh initially

also intended to paint a small fish in the strainer on the canvas with sea fish, since part of the strainer shines through the large body of the cod.

The palette of the two canvasses is also intentionally balanced. The tonality of the painting of freshwater fish is rather warm with browns and reds, while the eye of the beholder is drawn to the silvery-white fish at the centre. The overall tone of the painting of the sea fish is a golden brown, and here too the eye is attracted by the central silvery fish bodies. A dark-bluish accent is provided by the herring in the right foreground.

The same pair of herring features in a much smaller panel by Van Schaeyenborgh, while some of the other fish also occur quite similarly in several of his other paintings.⁴ In composing his paintings, the artist must have had a stock of detailed studies of fish at his disposal. This notwithstanding, the result he obtained was no less lifelike. FGM



41 Unknown artist, Amsterdam?

Three studies of a sea scorpion or bull rout c. 1640

Oil on paper, 19.5 x 31 cm. Verso, in red chalk: *A young man on a chair* and *A young man standing, holding a gun*
Bonn, Rheinisches Landesmuseum, inv. no. 39.1060

¹ See Bonn 1982, pp. 388–389.

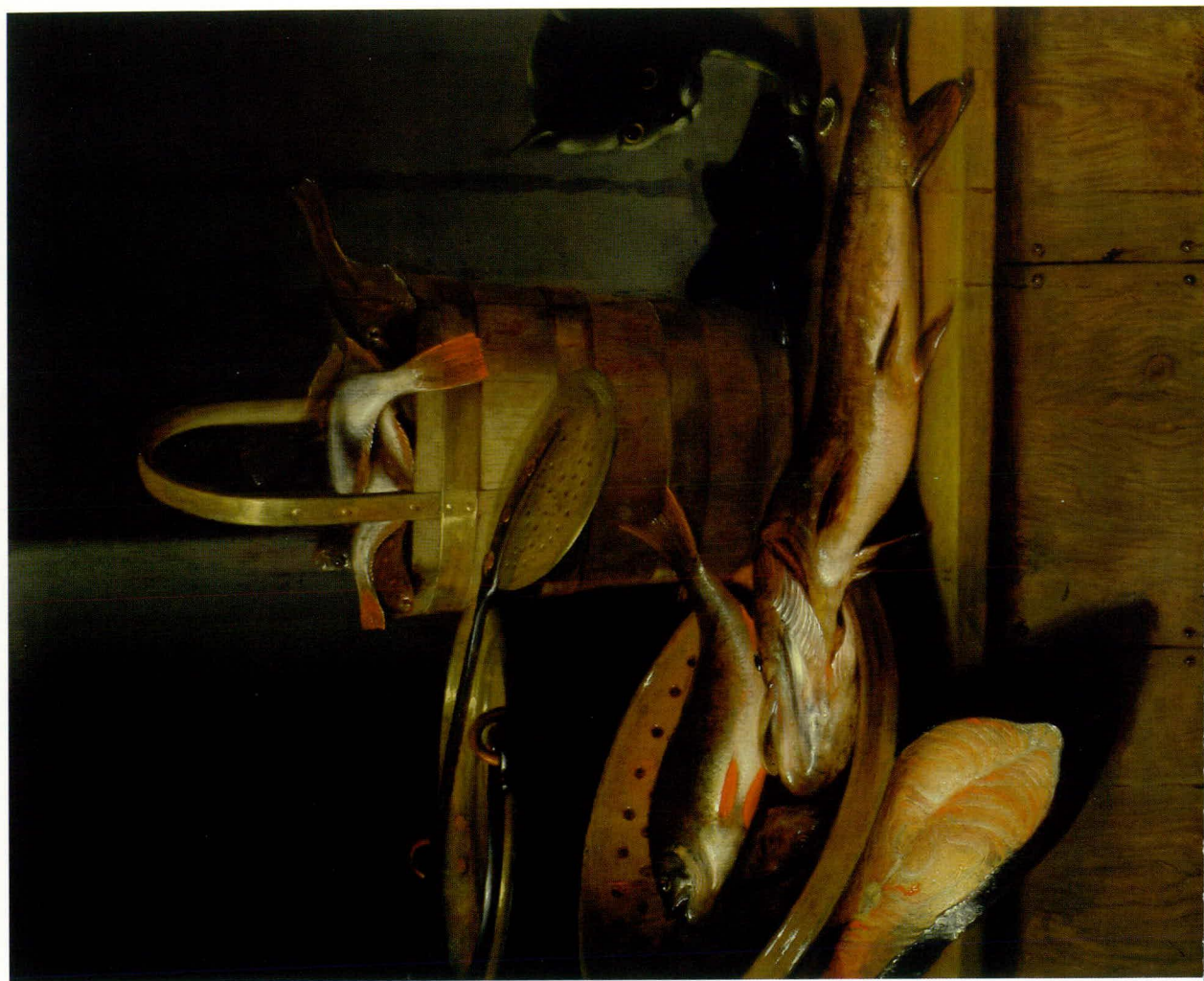
No doubt due to its exotic appearance, the sea scorpion is frequently included in Netherlandish fish still lifes. An unknown artist has here portrayed it in three different positions. Rendered in virtually the same poses as the two in the foreground, it is encountered in paintings by Adriaen van Utrecht (fig. 9, p. 26) and Johannes Fabritius (fig. 44, p. 60), as well as in one of Jan van Kessel's works in this catalogue (cat. no. 15), though divergently painted by each artist. Clearly, these are the most obvious poses in which to depict the fish.

This painting on paper – entirely different in nature from cat. no. 27, the precise status of which remains uncertain – was most likely made as a study that could serve as an example in making still lifes. The model was undoubtedly a freshly caught specimen. However, the fish could not have still been alive when it was portrayed, even though the clear eyes and the curved pose – suggesting motion – of the fish at the upper left contribute greatly to the 'lifelikeness' of the depiction.

Most seventeenth-century still lifes, including fish pieces, must have been composed with the aid of individual studies, be it drawings in pen or chalk, watercolours, or oil studies such as this one. Given that fact, it is puzzling that almost no examples survive – neither of fish nor of other still-life motifs. The same applies not only for studies of fish, but any still-life subject.

When this study was given to the Rheinisches Landesmuseum in Bonn in 1939, it was attributed to Alexander Adriaenssen, but the quality of the observation and handling clearly exceed his abilities. More recently, Pieter van Noort has been suggested as its maker on the basis of his study of five plaice in the Dordrechts Museum (cat. no. 51).¹ However, the similarity with that painting is limited to the fact that both are small, horizontal studies of a few sea fish. The Dordrecht picture clearly displays Van Noort's fluid, painterly facture (cf. cat. no. 52), while the Bonn study is painted meticulously, with great refinement and restraint. Moreover, except for the Dordrecht plaice, as far as we know, Van Noort (who was based in Zwolle, at a remove from the sea) never painted sea fish.

It is uncertain whether the sea scorpions and the two studies of a young man on the back of the sheet are by the same hand. The execution of the drawings appears to be weaker than that of the painted fish. The manner in which the young men are drawn, however, could help determine the place and date of origin of the fish studies. The style is reminiscent of the work of Amsterdam genre painters from the 1630s and 1640s, such as Willem Duyster and Pieter Codde. Perhaps the maker of this sea scorpion or bull rout should be sought in their circle. FGM



42 Wallérant Vaillant (1623-1677)

Still life of fish with a cat c. 1650

Oil on panel, 71.5 x 62 cm. Signed and dated lower right: A. cuijp 1645 (possibly covering the original signature)

Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, inv. no. VdV 11a

¹ Meijer 1989, cat. no. 59, as Dutch School (Dordrecht?), mid-seventeenth century.

² The first, oil on panel, 110 x 75.3 cm, reappeared in sale Amsterdam (Christie's), 4 May 1999, lot 28, colour ill.; the second, oil on canvas, 105 x 105 cm, signed and dated 1652, sale London (Phillips), 7 July 1992, lot 48, colour ill., and subsequently at the Rafael Valls Gallery, London. See also F.G. Meijer in Rotterdam 1994, no. 31.

In the course of time, Aelbert Cuyp has been credited with quite a few still lifes, but nowadays it is uncertain whether he painted any at all.

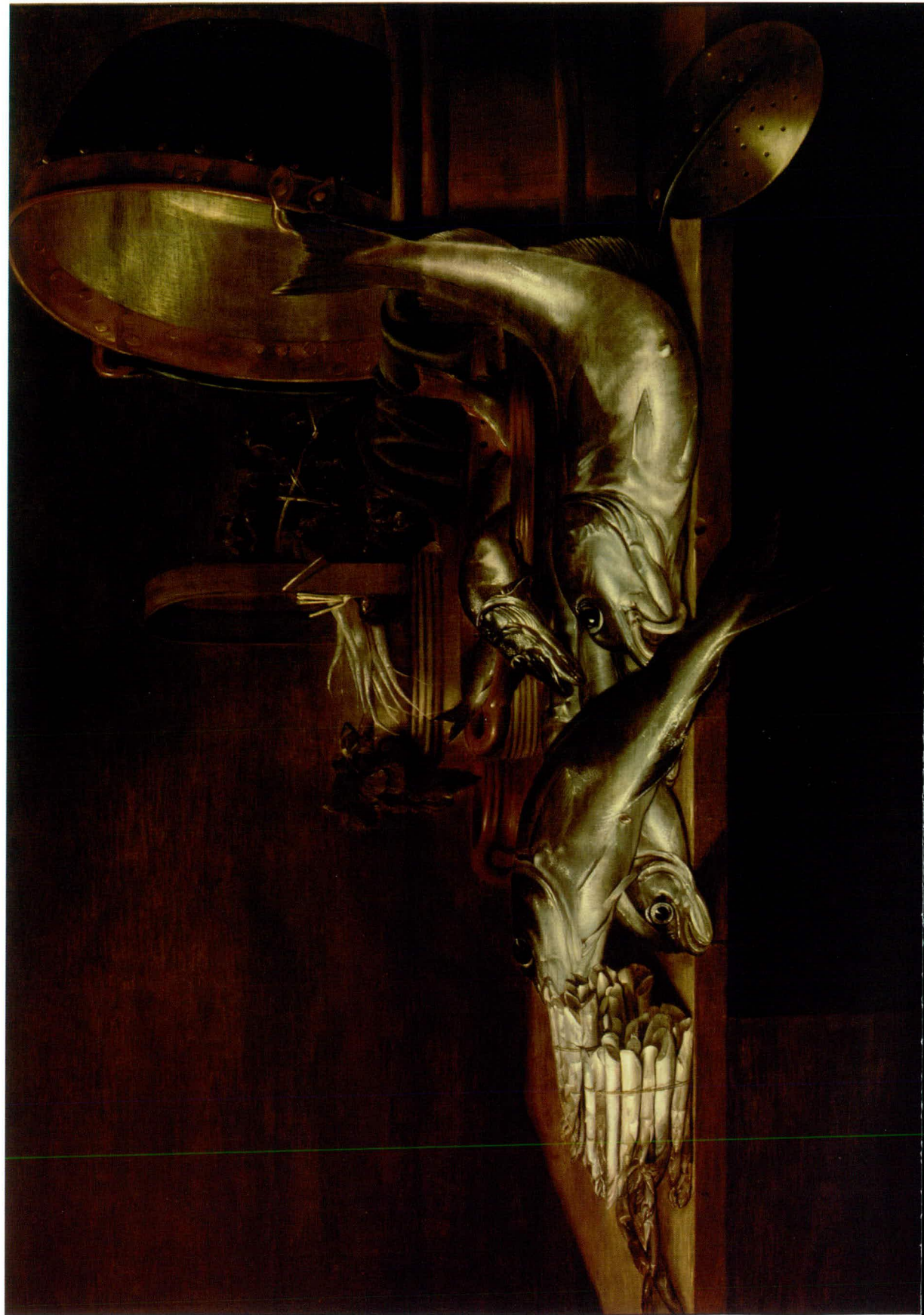
The majority of the still lifes attributed to him were of fruit. In the meantime, many of them have been identified as the work of Abraham van Calraet, who – perhaps intentionally – signed with an AC monogram that was (later) mistaken for Cuyp's (see cat. no. 46). The painting on view was provided with an Aelbert Cuyp signature at a later date and accepted as his work until 1989, when it was again consigned to anonymity.¹

Eventually, the cat – or kitten – turned out to be the key for identifying the artist: the identical animal is found in a signed *Still life of game and a calf's head* by Wallérant Vaillant. After this discovery, it appeared moreover that the same bucket recurs in a signed and 1652 dated *Still life with hunting trophies* by the same artist.² The close relationship between the three still lifes suggests that they originated around the same time in the early 1650s.

Next to his game still lifes, Wallérant Vaillant's most important contribution to still-life painting consisted of several so-called *trompe l'oeils*, paintings of a plain board on which letters and writing accessories have been stuck behind ribbons. The rendering of the nailed boards below the counter in this fish piece is very close to that in the *trompe l'oeils*.

Wallérant Vaillant presumably trained in Antwerp, and worked briefly in Middelburg before settling in Amsterdam in the late 1640s. Consequently, it is not surprising that his work betrays a variety of influences. None, however, are particularly apparent in this fish still life, though a slight Antwerp influence (one thinks of Alexander Adriaenssen and Clara Peeters) can be detected. Buckets like the one in the painting on view feature regularly in still lifes by Jacob Gerritsz. Cuyp of Dordrecht, but also, for example, in the work of Pieter van Schaeyenborgh (see cat. no. 40). Above all, this fish still life exhibits a distinctly personal approach to the subject and it appears to have been a once-in-a-lifetime experiment – no other fish still lifes by Vaillant are known, nor have any been recorded. He does present a cat with some fish in one of his many mezzotints, but there the cat is the main subject and the small fish merely its attributes.

The choice of fish on this table – a kitchen counter, judging by the cooking utensils – is limited and rather standard: plaice, perch, pike and a slice of salmon, together with a portion of mussels and the shell of a cockle near the kitten's paw. FGM



43 Abraham Vosmaer (1618-in or after 1660)

Fish on a kitchen counter c. 1650

Oil on panel, 73.8 x 108 cm. Signed and dated indistinctly lower left: A.(V)osmaer 16..

Delft, Stedelijk Museum Het Prinsenhof, inv. no. PDS 214

¹ See Bredius 1915-1922, pp. 1441, 1442 and 1444.

² Oil on panel, 50.5 x 72 cm, signed AV.f...r, sale Amsterdam (Sotheby's), 17 November 1993, lot 4, ill., as by A. van der Schoor, due to an incorrect interpretation of the signature.

Abraham Vosmaer was hardly known, even to art historians, as the maker of some fairly simple fruit still lifes, and it only became evident about a decade ago that he had also painted a few fish still lifes. This is confirmed by the fact that Delft inventories from 1658 and 1666 list fish pieces by Abraham Vosmaer, as well as by 'Vosmaer' (without a first name or an initial), which are likely to be by the same artist.¹ The painting shown here first appeared on the art market around 1986. At the time it was attributed to Pieter van Schaejenborgh due to an incorrect reading of the remains of the signature. In 1993 a related and more distinctly signed painting surfaced: a still life with kitchen utensils and a few fish, including an earthenware strainer with a pike similarly hanging over its edge.² Both paintings also include an identical skimmer seen from a different angle, while the counter itself and its illumination are exactly the same in both images.

Stylistically, Vosmaer's still life accords quite well with Harmen Steenwijck's plain still lifes (see cat. nos. 44-45): the latter was also active in Delft around the same time. The prominently placed cauldron recalls the work of Cornelis Jz. Delff (1570/71-1643), the Delft 'godfather' of the still life with kitchen utensils. Also discernible is a certain stylistic kinship with several small kitchen pieces by Gerrit van Vucht (c. 1610-1697), who was active in the vicinity of Delft and who may even have spent some time there (fig. 49, p. 64).

Although Vosmaer ranks among the minor masters of the Dutch seventeenth century, his rendering of salt- and freshwater fish is quite convincing. They have volume and weight, and his depiction of the silvery shimmer and shine of their skins can compete with that of fish painted by other, more prominent artists – as is confirmed by the fact that the painting's previous attribution to Pieter van Schaejenborgh was not challenged for years. **FGM**



44 Harmen Steenwijck (c. 1612-in or after 1656)

Fish and other foodstuffs with a large bellarmine on a tabletop c. 1640-1645

Oil on panel, 70 x 94.5 cm

Galerie Virginie Pitchal, Paris

¹ On the dating of Steenwijck's still lifes, see Meijer 2003, pp. 285-291.

² The shells appear to be the result of an overzealous restorer's work. When the painting first appeared on the art market in 1989 (with an incorrect attribution to C.Jz. Delff), the tail of the sturgeon was shaped somewhat differently, and the shells were speckled eggs and fewer in number; the restorer apparently decided that shells were more appropriate next to fish.

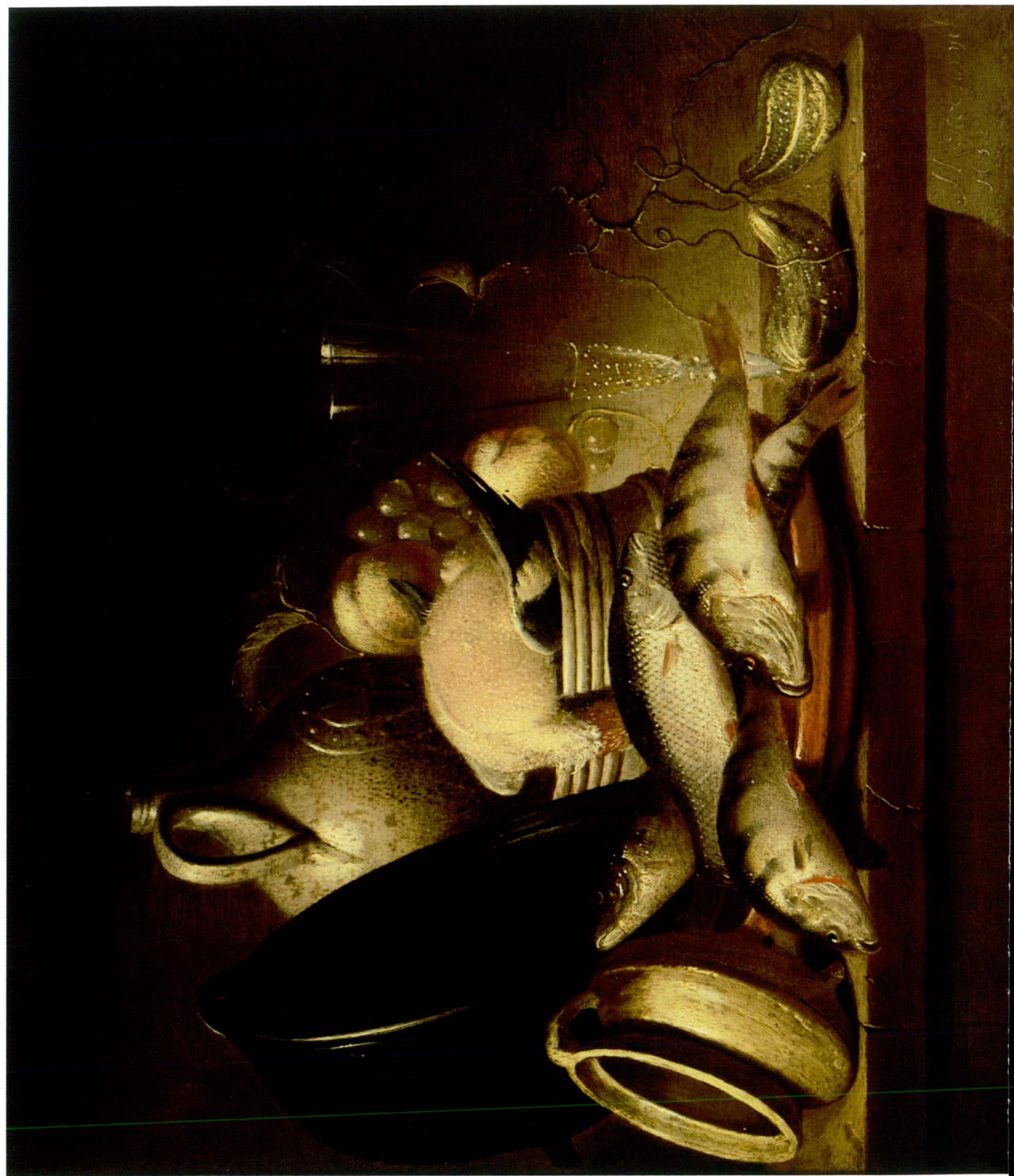
This is one of Harmen Steenwijck's larger and more elaborate still lifes. The attention to detail places it fairly early in the artist's career, probably in the beginning of the 1640s.¹ As such, it is closely related to his magnificent, even larger *Fish stall* (fig. 48, p. 63) which, moreover, includes a similar earthenware strainer with freshwater fish. The present still life, however, shows a kitchen rather than a market stall, even if the fish are still uncut. A knife lies at the ready, though, its handle facing the viewer.

Like most of Steenwijck's compositions, this painting displays a variety of foodstuffs, this time with fish as the main feature, a choice of freshwater species including pike, carp, bream and roach, next to a relatively small sturgeon. The shells behind the sturgeon may not have been part of the original composition, however.²

The basket in the left background contains liver, onions, pears and two plucked piketails. The varied textures and colours of these foodstuffs compensate for the plainness of the silvery greys and browns of the fish.

The bulbous bellarmine before the cauldron to the left is a powerful and prominent motif in the composition. While its large shape counterbalances the abundance of smaller ones around it, the detailed depiction of its salt-glazed body is in keeping with that of the other elements in the painting. It is positioned such that the bearded mask on its neck is blocked from view, but the (probably fictitious) medallion on its belly is visible.

Contemporary viewers may well have recognised the Four Elements in this image: the fish, of course, representing Water; the meat, bread, fruit and vegetables, Earth; and the birds, Air. In that case, together with the cauldron, strainer and porcelain dish, the bellarmine would stand for Fire, as products of that element. Additionally, the cracked and chipped stone ledge could be a *vanitas* aspect: nothing is permanent, and in time even the hardest of stones disintegrates. FGM



45 Harmen Steenwijck (c. 1612-in or after 1656)

Still life of fish, kitchen utensils and gherkins 1652

Oil on panel, 30.2 x 35.5 cm. Signed and dated lower right: H. Steenwijck / 1652

Delft, Stedelijk Museum Het Prinsenhof (on loan from the Instituut Collectie Nederland, Rijswijk, inv. no. NK 2410)

¹ Both oil on panel, 23 x 27 cm, signed and dated 1652, inv. nos. SK-A-1528 and 1529.

Harmen Steenwijck painted a considerable number of these small still lifes with kitchen utensils and foodstuffs. They are characterised by a direct, forceful and somewhat brushy handling of the paint, a strong, bright and almost dramatic lighting, and a compact composition with a distinct imaginary diagonal. In this painting, the diagonal runs from upper left to lower right, and is accentuated by the division between light and dark in the background. The artist often produced these still lifes in pairs, an example of which from the same year, 1652, is in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.¹ A dish of freshwater fish plays a central role in the pendants as well as in this still life. Steenwijck apparently favoured fish in 1652, the last year from which dated works by the artist appear to have been preserved.

Like most of Steenwijck's panels of this type, the exhibited painting presents freshwater fish. With only four perch and a chub or ide, the selection here is more limited than in his larger still life that originated

some ten years earlier (cat. no. 44). The fact that the fish are more difficult to identify than in his earlier still lifes underscores a shift in his attention to detail. Comparison of other motifs found in both paintings, such as the plucked duck, yields a similar discrepancy which may be the result of a somewhat routine approach. By this late stage in his career, Steenwijck appears to have known exactly how to achieve the maximum saleable effect with a minimum of effort. He could randomly and freely combine elements used earlier when composing a new still life. This conclusion may seem somewhat derogatory, but one must remember that like any other craftsman, an artist such as Harmen Steenwijck worked primarily for a free market, to which he had to adapt his skills. Experience had probably taught him that the larger meticulously painted works he initially produced were far more difficult to sell than the smaller ready-made, rapidly painted pieces, which placed less of a burden on his buyers' sometimes limited budgets. **FGM**



46 Abraham van Calraet (1642-1722)

Still life with a lobster and haddock on a strainer c. 1690

Oil on panel, 59.5 x 73.5 cm. Signed lower right: A.C. (in monogram)

N.J. Oppenheimer collection, Sweden

¹ By the present author in the files of the RKD, The Hague, in 2002. In a letter to the owner (October 1999) I had still left open the possibility of Cuypp's authorship.

² For instance in Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen: oil on panel, 37 x 47.4 cm, with apocryphal monogram, inv. no. 1392.

³ Oil on panel, 48.3 x 38.5 cm, signed in monogram, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, inv. no. P.D. 62-1973

⁴ Oil on canvas, 61 x 124.5 cm, signed in monogram, last seen in sale New York (Sotheby's), 21 January 2001, lot 158, with colour ill.

In the entry on the painting by Wallérant Vaillant (cat. no. 42), it is noted that of the many still lifes once thought to be by Aelbert Cuypp, virtually none are now attributed to him. This one with a fresh lobster, crabs and two haddock on a strainer was one of the longest surviving candidates and was only recently given to Abraham van Calraet.¹ Its unusual subject may be the reason why it was not readily associated with Van Calraet: it is the only fish still life among a host of still lifes of fruit, in which peaches often play an important role.² It is not the only such exception, though, for Van Calraet also painted a single bouquet of flowers.³ Both works display his preference for fairly large, softly rounded shapes and a powerful chiaroscuro, with a sort of spotlight effect on the key objects. Highly characteristic features in this painting are the table and the water drops upon it. Like almost all of Van Calraet's tables, this one, too, appears to have rounded edges and it remains somewhat unclear where the top ends and the side begins. The water drops behave more like mercury: instead of spreading over the surface, they retain a shape reminiscent of glassy beans or pearls and cast heavy shadows. These shadows, as well as those of other objects, are another typical aspect of Van Calraet's still lifes.

Perhaps this still life should be dated somewhat later than the majority of the fruit still lifes, which are generally considered to have originated early on in his artistic career. The modelling of the bodies of the haddock in particular is like Van Calraet's modelling of cows: rather soft and bulky. His paintings of cattle, horseback riders and such also reveal the artist's penchant for the anecdotal, in this painting represented by the crabs, which appear to be still alive and crawling, at least the two up front.

Although the fish on the strainer command our attention as a result of the light flooding down upon them, they nevertheless have to compete for it with the majestic lobster, its enormous claw resting on a bunch of seaweed almost as testimony of its freshness. Van Calraet portrayed the animal in great detail. Similarly large lobster claws also play a prominent role in another one of his still lifes.⁴ There the lobster has been cooked, and its bright red colour vies with the vivid colours of the fruit around it. The difference between such a luxurious image and this down-to-earth table of fish could hardly be greater, yet the artist's preoccupation with the play of light and shapes is equally apparent in both works. **FGM**



LOF

VAN DEN PERLDRENGING

De goddelijke gaven, die de zee ons geeft,
Zijn niet alleen voor ons, maar ook voor de zee.
Die ons de vruchten van de zee geeft,
Die ons de vruchten van de zee geeft.

Met zee en land, met zee en land,
Met zee en land, met zee en land.
Met zee en land, met zee en land,
Met zee en land, met zee en land.

En dat is het, dat is het,
En dat is het, dat is het.
En dat is het, dat is het,
En dat is het, dat is het.

Van zee en land, van zee en land,
Van zee en land, van zee en land.
Van zee en land, van zee en land,
Van zee en land, van zee en land.

En dat is het, dat is het,
En dat is het, dat is het.
En dat is het, dat is het,
En dat is het, dat is het.

Van zee en land, van zee en land,
Van zee en land, van zee en land.
Van zee en land, van zee en land,
Van zee en land, van zee en land.

En dat is het, dat is het,
En dat is het, dat is het.
En dat is het, dat is het,
En dat is het, dat is het.

Van zee en land, van zee en land,
Van zee en land, van zee en land.
Van zee en land, van zee en land,
Van zee en land, van zee en land.

En dat is het, dat is het,
En dat is het, dat is het.
En dat is het, dat is het,
En dat is het, dat is het.

Van zee en land, van zee en land,
Van zee en land, van zee en land.
Van zee en land, van zee en land,
Van zee en land, van zee en land.

En dat is het, dat is het,
En dat is het, dat is het.
En dat is het, dat is het,
En dat is het, dat is het.

ANNO

1634.

47 Joseph de Bray (1628/34-1664)*Lof van den Pekelharingh* (Praise of pickled herring) 1656

Oil on panel, 57 x 48.5 cm. Signed and dated lower centre: Jos:Bray./ 1656 (and dated in the poem: ANNO 1656)

Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, inv. no. 1407

¹ Westerbaen 1633, pp. 54-55.² Oil on panel, 67 x 49 cm, signed and dated 1657, Aachen, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, inv. no. GK 0063.³ See Weber 1987, pp. 131 sq.⁴ It is highly unusual for the light to fall from the right. The vast majority of Netherlandish still lifes from the seventeenth century (98%, if not more) are illuminated from the left.

Rather than a still life, this painting may be understood as an advertisement *avant la lettre*. The artist arranged several fat herring and other foodstuffs together with a jug and two glasses of beer around a monumental plaque on which a poem is inscribed. The combination of a commendatory text and an appealing image may be ubiquitous in modern advertising, but this was quite unique in seventeenth-century painting.

The poem, entitled *Lof van den Pekelharingh* (Praise of pickled herring), was written by the theologian and doctor Jacob Westerbaen (1599-1670), the painter's uncle, and first published in 1633.¹ In it, the author extols the nutritious and medicinal qualities as well as the wonderful taste of this fish. He who delights in the consumption of a herring, he claims, is far better off than someone nibbling on dainty titbits, 'special and frivolous delicacies'.

It also describes how the herring is served: the head severed, the belly cut open, the bowels removed, and the skin cleaned (of scales). Rye bread and butter, and onions should accompany it. Above all, the author recommends the combination of herring and beer, 'Breda or Haarlem broth', or from the Delft barrels. The herring properly 'prepares the throat for drinking', he explains, and revives one's appetite for drink. Almost an entire strophe is dedicated to the digestive advantages of eating herring: '[It] will make you piss well/ And you will not fail/ (with permission) to shit/ nor will it keep you from releasing wind.'

In a variant of the painting, part of another poem by Westerbaen is included, *Verhuysinge van Cupido* (Cupid's move), in which Cupid is banned by the gods and settles in The Hague.² This combination of quotations suggests a connection between the pickled herring and matters of the heart and, indeed, in seventeenth-century treatises salty dishes were thought to improve the fertility of women and the potency of men and accordingly their urge to make love: the pickled herring as aphrodisiac.³ This may also explain why Westerbaen included his verses about herring in a booklet of love poems, even though the text is devoid of any such connotations.

Joseph de Bray fully succeeded in portraying the herring's fatness and greasy quality. He clearly enjoyed the challenge of rendering many different textures: the shiny hardness of the porcelain, the textile quality of the leaves in the wreath, the bread's crispy crust and the transparency of the glasses and the beer have all been captured equally convincingly in the soft light falling on them.⁴ The composition and choice of subject prove Joseph de Bray's great originality, as does the rest of his painted oeuvre: his floral still lifes differ greatly – in an equally positive sense – from the more mainstream works at the time. **FGM**



48 Pieter Claesz. (c. 1597-1660)

Still life of fish on a plain table 1660

Oil on canvas, 64.4 x 79.2 cm. Signed and dated lower left: A° PC ' 1660. (PC in monogram)

Prague, Národní galerie v Praze, inv. no. O 2355

¹ The first example is from 1655, oil on panel, 50 x 68 cm; the second is dated 1656, oil on panel, 46 x 63 cm; the third is from 1657, oil on panel, 52 x 84.5 cm.

All three were last recorded in Dutch private collections. Vroom 1980, cat. nos. 535, 536 and 537, listed and illustrated all three as works by Clara Peeters without any solid ground whatsoever. He even based Peeters' presumed death date on the date on the last of the three works. Curiously, he illustrated the Prague painting as by Pieter Claesz., but made no mention of it in his text.

² The first, oil on panel, 73 x 94 cm, with B. Koetser, London, 1972; the second, oil on canvas, 101 x 135 cm, with Rafael Valls Ltd, London, 1995, cat. no. 9, colour ill. (neither are in Vroom 1980).

³ In Auckland 1982, cat. no. 19, pp. 124-127, Eddy de Jongh defended such an explanation of the animal's presence. He clearly has a point in the case of genre paintings, such as the Maes he illustrates, but to my mind, in the still lifes the cat is merely stealing fish.

Pieter Claesz. is one of the better-known seventeenth-century Dutch still-life painters. His often restrained and somewhat monochromatic still lifes of foodstuffs, 'breakfast pieces', can be found in many museums and private collections throughout the world. They frequently include a dish with a herring, a fried carp, or a seasoned salmon steak, a crab or occasionally a lobster, however not one of them can qualify as a proper fish still life (see fig. 46, p. 61).

Claesz. painted a few pure fish still lifes only at the end of his life: the four known examples are from 1655, 1656, 1657 and the one exhibited here from 1660, the last year of his life.¹ In each of the three earlier works, a crouching, compact, furry cat has sunk its teeth into a small fish. Eyes wide and ears perked up, the animal will undoubtedly dash off as soon as it is discovered in *flagrante delicto*. It is worth noting that these three cats are the only living creatures in Claesz.'s entire oeuvre (spanning almost four decades) along with a young St Bernard tempted by a ham in a work from 1652, and a cat contemplating stealing a pike in a large kitchen still life (with quite a few fish) from 1651.²

Like many of his contemporaries, Pieter Claesz. clearly associated cats with fish. Whether the cat in his still lifes was meant to have erotic connotations remains to be proven.³ The composition of this Prague still life is almost the mirror image of the work from 1656 and if the cat in that painting has erotic implications, they have completely vanished here together with the animal.

The painting from 1656 and the one on view cannot actually be pendants: their date of origin, dimensions and supports all differ. Claesz. did, however, sign and date both works in a kindred fashion, with the 'A°' and the date to either side of his monogram, as he did more frequently during the 1650s. Both pictures are also similarly broadly painted. Claesz.'s handling became coarser during the 1640s, but the fish still life of 1657 is one of several cases in point that he could still paint in a more refined and meticulous manner when he so wished. Perhaps the 1656 and Prague fish still lifes were made for the free market, while the one from 1657 was painted on commission in anticipation of a handsome fee. FGM



49 Matthias Withoos (1627-1703)*Fish on the quay of the Grashaven in Hoorn* c. 1675

Oil on canvas, 92.6 x 129.6 cm. Signed lower centre: MWithoos (MW in monogram)

Hoorn, Westfries Museum, inv. no. 13717

¹ For example, sale Amsterdam (Christie's), 7 May 1992, lot 155, ill.

² Oil on canvas, 66 x 102.5 cm, signed and dated 1675, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, cat. no. SK A 1925, on permanent loan to the Westfries Museum, Hoorn.

³ Enkhuizen, Zuiderzeemuseum, inv. no. 6106.

This painting of the Grashaven, a harbour in Hoorn, is a somewhat unusual work in the oeuvre of Matthias Withoos. The artist is best known for his landscapes that sometimes border on forest-floor still lifes. Those works often have a Mediterranean feel to them, resulting from Withoos' travels in Italy around 1650. Such pictures occasionally feature some fish as the catch of an otter on an overgrown riverbank.¹ In general, however, the subject of fish does not appear to have particularly inspired the artist. The present painting will have been produced primarily as a view of Hoorn, the fish serving to illustrate the activities taking place on the quay of the Grashaven.

Together with his family, Matthias Withoos moved from his native Amersfoort to Hoorn around 1672. Several of his sons and daughters followed in his footsteps and became artists. While their work bears evidence to a keen interest in natural history, fish still lifes no longer captivated them.

At the end of his career, Withoos could only paint with great difficulty as a result of gout. The painting on view here, however, was produced well before he began to suffer from this illness. It is very similar to another image of the same location dated 1675, suggesting that the present painting was done around the same time, only a few years after the artist's arrival in Hoorn.² In addition to portraying the maintenance of

ships in the left background, the scene chiefly shows Hoorn as a fishing harbour. A woman rinses fish in the water of the harbour, and the two men behind her also seem to be busy with fish. Fishermen tend to their boats and we also see a long flat boat with several large, round fish baskets. A few of these baskets are also piled up on the quay to the right, together with all sorts of other fishing gear: fish traps in the form of nets and baskets, and several landing nets. In the foreground are some spools of fishing wire and bricks to which ropes are attached – probably used to weigh down the nets.

Like many of his fellow painters, Withoos dishes up a collection of salt- and freshwater fish not particularly realistically displayed in a tub of water, in and on baskets and on the quay itself. A crab proudly sits in the front row. Withoos seems to have struck on a marketable subject, for in addition to the painting from 1675, another, third version of this composition is known.³ The fish still life in that work is even more prominent, and almost identical to the one shown here, albeit some of the fish have been slightly shifted. With these paintings, Withoos was most likely meeting the demands of a clientele engaged in the local fish trade. In any case, the large dimensions of these works suggest that they were more than just casual topographical views. **FGM**



50 François Ryckhals (1609-1647)

A cod on a beach 1643

Oil on panel, 60 x 103 cm. Signed in compendium and dated: FRHLS 1643

Brussels, Musée d'Ixelles, inv. no. JBW 00259

¹ A related example is in the Art Museum of Sebastapol, Ukraine: oil on panel, 47 x 83.5 cm, signed FRHLS and dated 164[.] (probably 1642).

² Buma 1994, p. 12.

As far as is known, the Middelburg artist François Ryckhals only painted a few substantial panels with a single, prominently featured fish and combined with a large, fresh lobster.¹ Even rarer are his still lifes of fish on a tabletop. All of Ryckhals' fish still lifes date from the last years of his life, from 1641 to 1647, and they do not appear to have been influenced by other artists.

Ryckhals' singular manner of painting greatly facilitates identification of his still lifes. Their palette – also evident in his many farm interiors and even his sumptuous still lifes – is generally somewhat reserved, dominated by browns and ochres, with creamy highlights and the occasional, sparing colour accent in red and yellow. Ryckhals worked on a dark ground, building up his layers from dark to light with fluent brushstrokes and maintaining a degree of transparency in the process. Abraham van Beijeren, who painted his fish in a similar way as of the late 1640s, could well have been inspired by Ryckhals, works by whom he may have seen in the second half of that same decade.

This image of a large cod on a beach, together with a sea lobster and a boat hook, first and foremost bespeaks the artist's fascination with the majestic fish and the details of its anatomy, not least its enormous gills. By including fishing vessels (to the right) and fishermen with their nets (to the left) in the background, Ryckhals was surely referring to the fishing trade. This allusion is even more pronounced in the artist's painting with Flushing in the background (fig. 54, p. 69). Given that the province of Zeeland consists mainly of islands, fishery was an important source of employment and income for the people living there. Ryckhals could well have found clients for his fish pictures among those who were involved in this industry. However, the high artistic quality of his work will have equally appealed to buyers with no particular professional connection with fish. His paintings were also valued outside of Middelburg, in fact they are found in inventories throughout the Netherlands: for instance, one of his fish pieces was recorded as being with the Amsterdam art dealer Renialme in 1657.² FGM



51 Pieter van Noort (active before 1649-1672)

A study of five plaice c. 1650

Oil on panel, 12 x 22.8 cm. Signed lower left and upper right: P.v.Noort. Bears dates lower left: 1622, and upper right: 1621
Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum, inv. no. DM/958/74

¹ Van Hoogstraten 1678, p. 76. 'It is certain that art has come to such misfortune, that one finds in the most famous cabinets the largest number of pieces, which should not be made other than as a delight or in play by a good Master, such as here a Bunch of Grapes, a Pickled Herring, or a Lizard, or there a Partridge, a Game Bag or that which is even less. Which things, while having their charms, are only like outgrowths of the art.'

² Streng & Van Dijk 1997, p. 89.

³ On 12 November 1621, the banns were posted for the marriage of Dirck Pietersz. van Noort and Soetgen Dirx La Feber and the actual marriage took place on 27 November 1621. Leiden, Municipal Archive, DTB, Schepenhuwelijken, Fol. 125, no. 14790b.

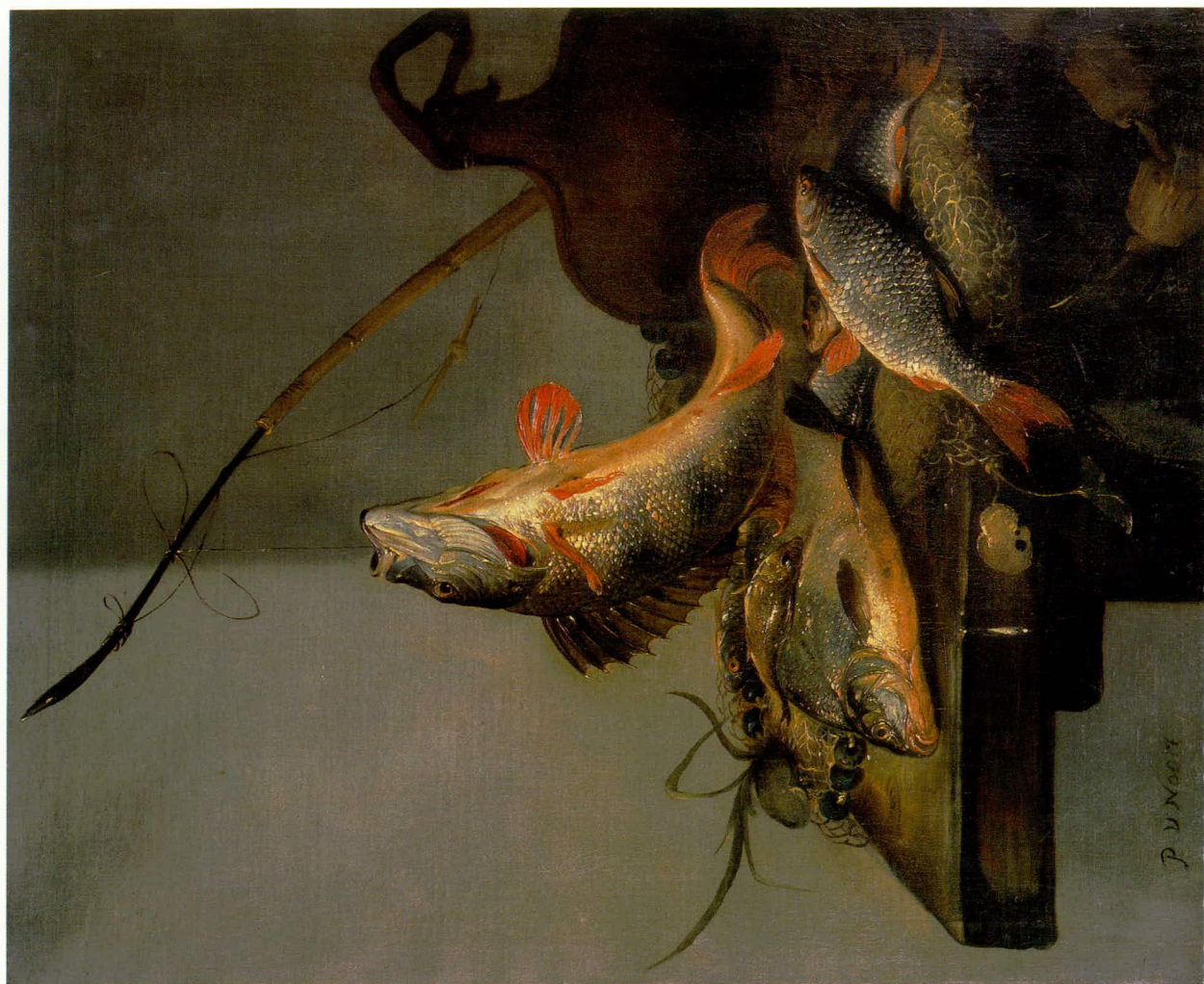
⁴ See Streng & Van Dijk 1997, note 86. It would be interesting to subject the panel to dendrochronological investigation. The results could afford greater certainty as to the date of the panel itself.

This interesting small study of five plaice assumes a special position in the oeuvre of Pieter van Noort for a number of reasons. It is the artist's only known study (cf. cat. no. 41) and, moreover, appears to be his only painting of sea fish. Van Noort's rather substantial output of fish still lifes portray freshwater fish (see cat. no. 52), probably because he lived and worked in Zwolle on the IJssel River. The purpose of this study remains uncertain. Van Noort may have painted it with the intention of using it as a model for a detail in later, larger compositions, or could have done it simply 'as a delight or in play'. This phrase was used by the painter and art theorist Samuel van Hoogstraten in 1678 when he lamented the fact that plain still lifes found their way into important collections of paintings where, at least in his view, they did not belong.¹

This still life long played a role in the reconstruction of Van Noort's biography, since it was generally assumed to be his earliest known work on the basis of the dates 1621 and 1622 it bears. As a result, his date of birth was set to around 1600. However, on stylistic grounds alone the reliability of the two dates should be seriously doubted: the painting does not fit in with any type of still life painted in the Northern Netherlands during the early 1620s. Moreover, the execution of these plaice bespeaks the skill and confidence of an experienced artist, and not of a youngster painting his first fish.

In a biography of the artist published in 1997, it was correctly concluded that Pieter was not the son of the Leiden history painter Pieter van Noort (c. 1592-after 1634), but rather of Derck van Noort, who was buried in 1624, and of Seutien Derks de la Febre, who was still alive in Leiden in 1655.² At that time, however, neither the artist's date of birth nor the date of his parents' wedding had been found. This marriage, in fact, took place in November 1621, indicating that the painter was most probably born sometime between 1622 and 1625.³ This agrees with the fact that his known dated works are limited to the years after 1650. Furthermore, it seems more plausible that he was about 30 rather than 50 or so at the time of his marriage in 1652. This also means that when he witnessed the foundation of the Leiden painters' guild in 1648 he was still a fairly young artist and that he established his reputation as a painter after his move to Zwolle.

The status of the two dates on this study remains unclear. It has been established that they were not added (much) later nor can they be read differently.⁴ In any case, relying on the present evidence, we must conclude that it was the artist who was probably conceived in 1621 or 1622, and not the painting, which probably originated after c. 1650. Since it differs in various respects from Van Noort's other work, it is not possible to suggest a firmer date on the basis of comparison. FGM



52 Pieter van Noort (active before 1649-1672)

Still life of river fish and fishing gear c. 1660

Oil on canvas, 81 x 69 cm. Signed lower left: P.V.Noort

Jack Kilgore & Co, New York

¹ Oil on canvas, 48.5 x 40.2 cm,
Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum,
inv. no. 560-08.

This still life of freshwater fish and fishing gear is a fine example of Pieter van Noort's many paintings of this subject. As here, most of them present the largest fish in the composition still hooked on the line of a fishing rod. This is often a big pike, but here it is a fat perch. The fishing rod differs little from a modern one: it has several parts that fit together, and a line with a moveable float, consisting of a wooden core and a round piece of cork. The line was probably simple twine – the nylon now used would not be invented for several centuries. In another work, Van Noort depicted a perch and bream hanging from a nail by the fishing line with which they were caught, float included. Two spools of fishing line are suspended from another nail next to them.¹

The fish are displayed on a plain table resting on a fishing net with cork floats attached to the edges. These freshwater fish are obviously presented as a catch, similar to the way in which Van Noort presented dead birds and hares in his game still lifes, together with the gun that

shot them, or the net that trapped them, and occasionally the little dog that helped track and chase them down. The big leather water bottle in the background is not actually a fishing attribute, but an item Van Noort apparently deemed indispensable for the fisherman as well as the hunter, since he included it in several of his fish still lifes and game pieces. Perhaps it simply served as a convenient, fairly dark and bulky shape to close off his composition.

Van Noort's forceful and painterly yet exact facture is manifest in this painting. The strong chiaroscuro and powerful palette are also characteristic of the artist's style. The light and colour accents immediately draw the viewer's attention to the fish, just where the artist wanted it. The strength of the composition is further enhanced by the imperative diagonal running from the lower right to the upper left, which is countered by the vertical division of light and dark in the background and by the placement of a few smaller fish at an angle to it. **FGM**



53 Mens[o] Hagius (active 1657-1663)

A pike and other fish in a fishing net 1662

Oil on canvas, 52 x 66 cm. Signed and dated upper left: Mens[o] . Hagius. fe[.] A° 1662.

Private collection, Europe

¹ The first: *A portrait of a youth [...]* his hat in his right hand, oil on panel, 29 x 22 in., sale London (Christie's), 11 April 1924, lot 82; the second sale Miss M.J. Grimmige collection, Groningen, 22 June 1863, lot 2, described as: 'Een stil leven, zijnde een dode roerdomp, een kieviet enz. (1663)' (A still life, being a dead bittern, a lapwing etc.), 1 el x 1 el 50 dm (probably c. 70 x 120 cm).

² Sale of the collection of S. Stinstra from Haarlem, Amsterdam 26 March 1783, lot 53, sold for 12 guilders to Rieker.

³ Instead, the name may have been German. A brief search on the Internet revealed that the composer Konrad Hagius (also: Von Hagen, c. 1550-1616) was active in Heidelberg around 1600 and that a Johannes Hagius was born in Ulmbach in 1640. This might add substance to the assumption that the painter Hagius may have been active in the eastern Netherlands.

Although the general public may think that everything is known about seventeenth-century Dutch painting, this is certainly not true. Every now and then a fine painting with a clearly legible signature surfaces, which nevertheless presents us with a partially, or even entirely insoluble puzzle. This still life, signed Menso (or Mensu?) Hagius is such a work. Not a single trace of the artist has been found, but old sale records reveal that other paintings bearing the same initial and last name were sold. These include a portrait from 1657 and a still life of game dated 1663, which was in a sale in Groningen in 1863.¹ The present fish still life turns out to have been sold at auction in Amsterdam in 1783.²

The style and handling of this piece are reminiscent of the work of Pieter van Noort (see cat. no. 52), who worked in a similar painterly manner, included fishing nets in his compositions, and regularly portrayed his fish lying on their side, with the underside facing the viewer. Hagius' fishing net is far more prominent than Van Noort's, however, and the sparkling way in which it catches the light is quite unprecedented. His fish are limper and heavier than those in Van Noort's paintings, and are

thus more realistically rendered. Just like Van Noort, they are freshwater fish, but Hagius has also added a small flatfish. It could be a flounder, a sea fish that sometimes swims far upstream.

The base of a classical column in the background of this fish still life is a unique feature. Such columns occur regularly in other types of still life, such as sumptuous still lifes and game still lifes, mostly to lend the composition a certain grandeur. Apparently the artist deemed this appropriate for his fish still life as well.

Given the stylistic connection with Van Noort, it makes sense to locate this master in his vicinity, namely in Zwolle. However, for the time being this suggestion cannot be substantiated. The name Hagius would appear to be a Latinised form of 'from The Hague', which could indicate that one of the artist's ancestors came from that town; there is no direct reason for designating him as an inhabitant of The Hague.³ Perhaps an archival reference will turn up that sheds more light on the identity of this intriguing *incognitus*. FGM



54 Hendrick ten Oever (1639-1716)

Still life with a lumpsucker c. 1670

Oil on panel, 56 x 70 cm. Signed lower left: H Ten Oever / fec:

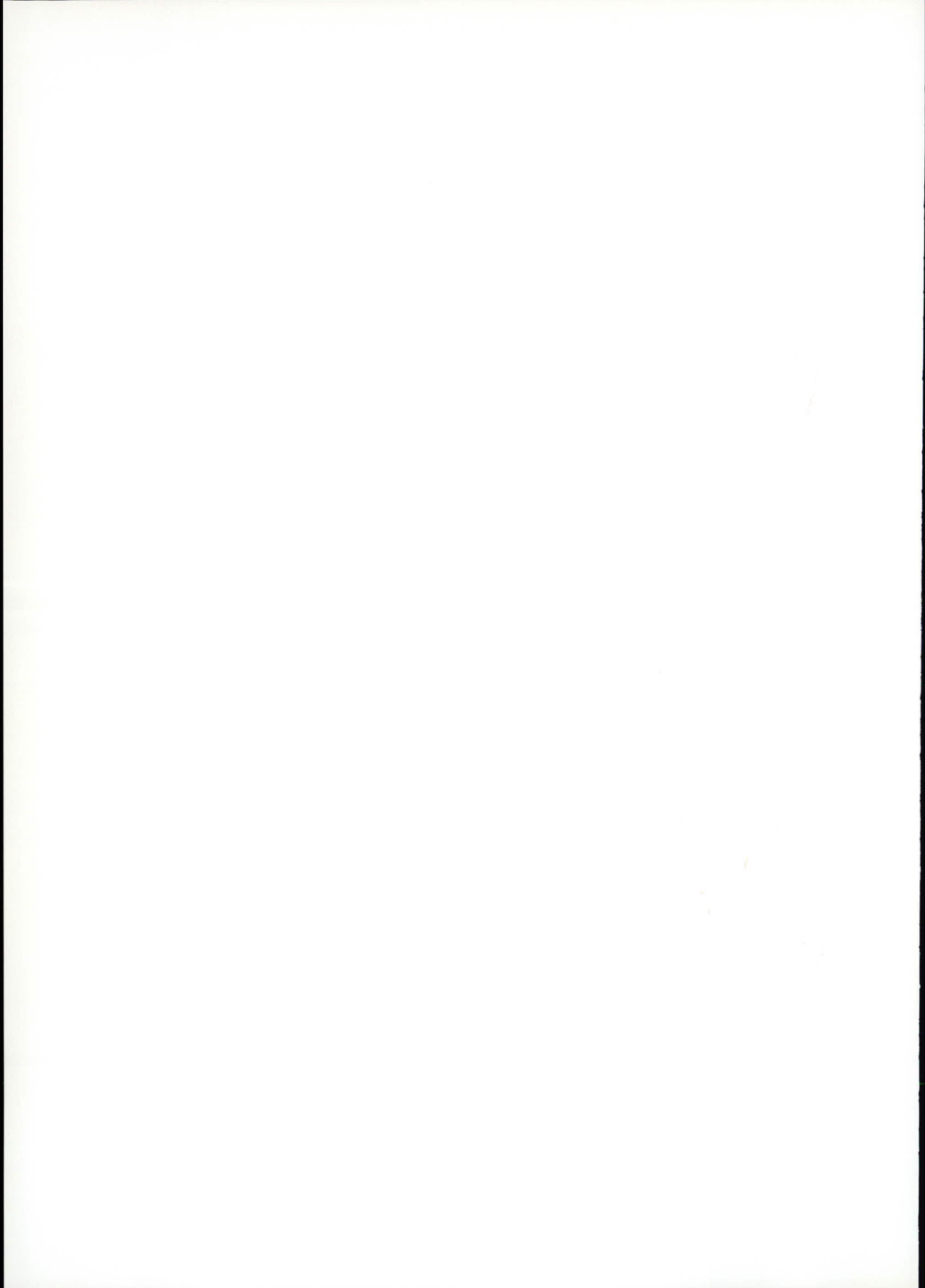
Private collection, Europe

¹ The game piece with a dead eagle, mentioned by Verbeek & Schotman 1957, p. 26, nos. 22 and 23 (both nos. must concern the same painting) is definitely by a different hand. Most recently the painting emerged in sale The Hague (Glerum), 13 November 1995, lot 74, ill. My suggestion that it is related to the work of Govert Dz. Camphuysen was incorrectly interpreted as an attribution to that artist in the catalogue.

² The still life with two dead jays is illustrated in colour in Streng & Van Dijk 1997, p. 107 (cat. no. 42)

Hendrick ten Oever was a very versatile painter. His oeuvre includes almost every type of subject commonly depicted at the time. He earned his reputation primarily as a painter of landscapes and portraits, but also produced genre pieces and mythological scenes. At present, only two still lifes by the artist are known.¹ The high quality of this fish still life and that of his still life with two dead jays from 1670 makes one wish that he had left us more such works.² Both are rather original pieces that betray little interest in imitating the work of others. Additionally, both are quite different from each other in atmosphere; the still life with dead birds is caught in a rather cool and sharp light that makes the most of their feathery exterior and the subtle variegation of their colouration. The treatment of the fish still life is no less subtle, but Ten Oever adapted the overall handling to the soft, curved shapes of the fish. The fish basket is as round and bulky as the body of the lumpsucker before it, though different in texture, while the fishing net to the right, with its folds, cork and bright threads, enlivens the scene.

'Portraits' of a single fish, like this one, are quite rare. Presumably, Ten Oever was fascinated by the fish's unusual shape. In addition to its fleshy roundness, the painter made sure to show the large sucker below the animal's chin, which it uses to hold onto underwater rocks. Judging from its colour, it is a male fish, which might indicate that Ten Oever found it on the market, since for consumption the flesh of the male lumpsucker is preferable to that of the female. She, however, produces the eggs that are nowadays sold as an inexpensive substitute for caviar. The fact that Ten Oever elected to paint this North Sea fish is remarkable, since his town of residence, Zwolle, is quite a remove from the open sea. To encounter a lumpsucker there, therefore, may have been exceptional and have added surplus value to this 'portrait'. It also evidences that the trade routes were swift enough that fresh sea fish could be sold so far inland. **FGM**



NORTHERN NETHERLANDS
SELLING AND CLEANING FISH



55 Quiringh Gerritsz. van Brekelenkam (1622/25-in or after 1669)

The fishwife c. 1665

Panel, 30 x 26 cm

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-C-178

¹ The round black mark on the young woman's cheek is a beauty spot; see cat. no. 59.

² *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche taal*, vol. XVII, col. 258.

³ See Stone-Ferrier 1991, and Amsterdam 1997, pp. 149-151.

⁴ Schneeman 1982, pp. 145 and 220 (cat. no. 53); Honig 1988. *The fishwife* was already attributed to Brekelenkam in 1789 (see Honig 1988) and again in 1899 by Hofstede de Groot: Hofstede de Groot 1899, p. 169.

This painting captures a moment during shopping: a young woman, presumably a servant, carefully counts the coins needed to pay for the fish she has just purchased and put into her bucket.¹ Only a red salmon steak is visible, hanging over the edge of her bucket. There are two other salmon steaks on the counter of the stall, together with some flatfish, probably sole, and two other, difficult to identify specimens, awaiting another customer. The fishwife stands impassively, filleting knife in hand. Behind her is a young boy with downcast eyes and a large hat on his head, clearly not a fisherman's child. Did the painter intend to suggest that this boy had accompanied the servant to market?

Brekelenkam painted a large set of scales to the right of the tradeswoman, and a tub lying on its side beneath the counter. Live fish could be kept for some time in such a wooden vessel, which presumably was also used as a measure: 'the tubs, therein are the fish measured and sold', as was described in an Amsterdam ordinance of 1643.²

During the early 1660s Brekelenkam painted a series of market scenes, incorporating some of the same components and based on a more or less set compositional scheme. On a number of occasions he turned his attention to the fish market, in particular the cleaning and preparation of fish for consumption. Market scenes had long been popular subjects in art, including prints. At the beginning of the second half of the seventeenth century, however, the genre received a fairly sudden new impetus in various cities.³ While Brekelenkam's sphere of activity lay in Leiden, in Amsterdam artists such as Gabriel Metsu were painting markets, and in Rotterdam Hendrick Sorgh (cat. nos. 57 and 60). Long attributed to Sorgh, the Rijksmuseum *Fishwife* was finally returned to its actual maker at a 1988 exhibition of Leiden *fijnschilders*, artists working in a fine and detailed style.⁴ EdeJ



56 Justus de Gelder (1650-1707/24)

Cleaning fish in a kitchen c. 1670

Oil on canvas, 60 x 73.8 cm

Private collection, Europe

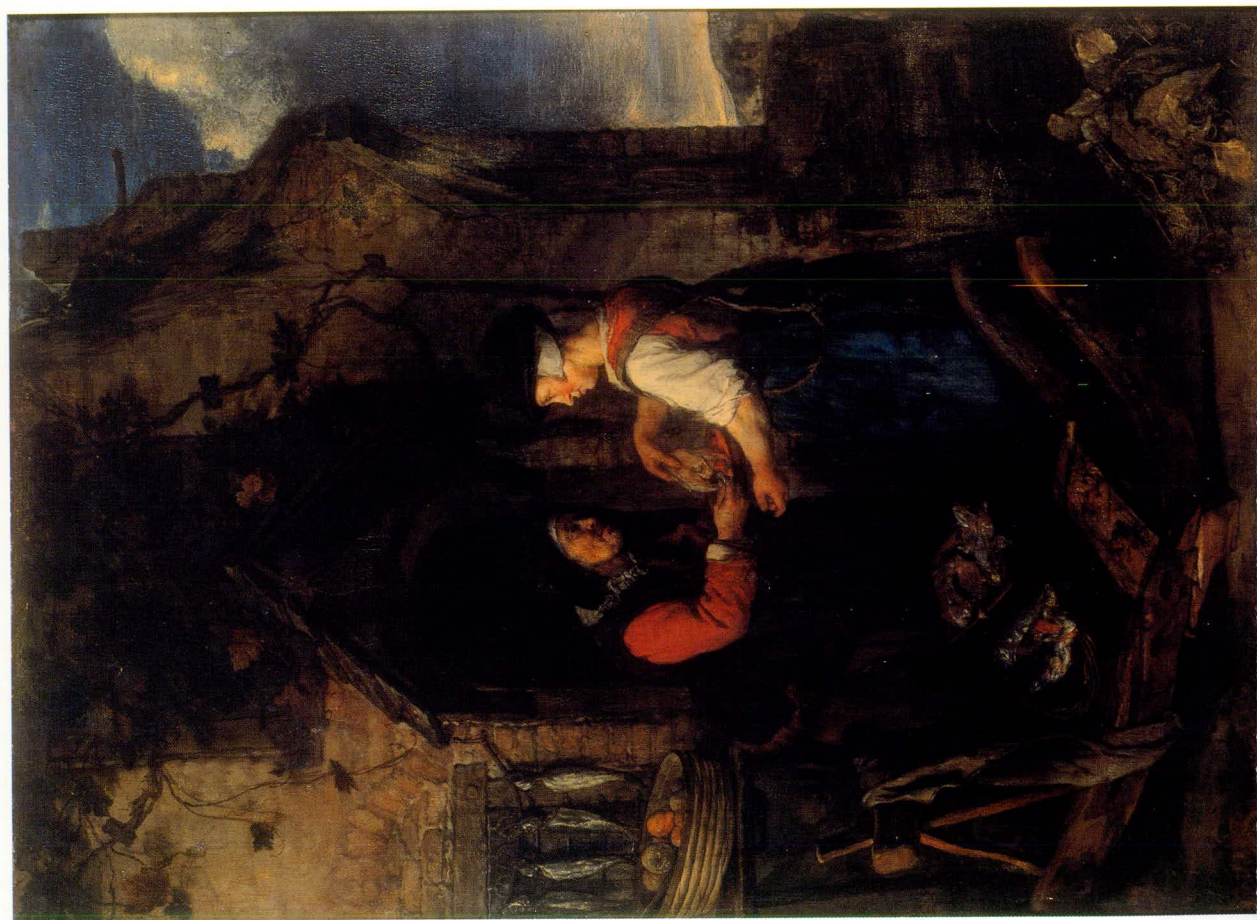
¹ As Lex Raat noted, the fish may be pike judging from the position of the fins, yet their colouring and flatness contradicts this identification.

² An initial step towards this reconstruction was taken in Krempel 2000, pp. 40, 364, 367 and figs. 437-440.

³ Justus de Gelder, *Two boys on a bridge*, oil on canvas, 89.7 x 71.5 cm, signed and dated 1671, private collection, the Netherlands.

On the basis of their attire and activities, the young woman in the fur-lined jacket – even though she is wearing an apron – may be assumed to be the lady of the house, and the other woman the maid who receives instructions while cleaning fish.¹ The image further suggests that the maid has recently returned from the market, where she purchased the two fish she probably carried home in the brass bucket on the table next to her. She most likely washed them in the wooden bucket on the floor, and could either cook them in the cauldron at the front right, or grill them on the grid hanging on the wall behind her. Should she decide to cook the fish, she can lift it out of the pan using the skimmer that is also at hand. Even though the reason why the young housewife points at the fish balancing on the edge of the table may not be entirely clear to us, the scene is certainly one of domestic virtue – the broom at the right may be understood as an allusion to the sense of order and cleanliness in this household. The inclusion of the church spire or chapel, a view of which is offered through the window in the background, is most likely quite intentional.

Stylistically, this painting is strongly related to similar works by the well-known Dordrecht painter Nicolaes Maes, and thus was attributed to him for quite some time. Close comparison with Maes' work, however, reveals differences in the handling of the paint and the modelling of the figures and objects. On the other hand, this kitchen scene does fit well into the (thus far) small oeuvre of Maes' stepson Justus de Gelder, which is gradually being reconstructed.² Justus was totally unknown as a painter until about a decade ago. Then, in 1996 a signed work by the artist came to light, dated 1671, which allowed the attribution of several other works to him that had generally been given to Nicolaes Maes.³ De Gelder's treatment of fabrics is quite distinctive, as are his smallish hands and brightly lit faces. The pointing and clutching hands of the women in this kitchen scene, for instance, are very similar to those of the two boys in the signed and dated painting. The discovery of Justus de Gelder and his work is yet another instance of how much there is still to learn about seventeenth-century Dutch painting if we just keep our eyes open and are willing to think along the new lines chance discoveries afford us. **FGM**



57 Gabriel Metsu (1629-1667)

The fishwife c. 1660

Panel, 52 x 40 cm. Signed lower right: GMetSu

Prague, Národní galerie v Praze, inv. no. O 125

¹ See Robinson 1974.

² Stone-Ferrier 1989.

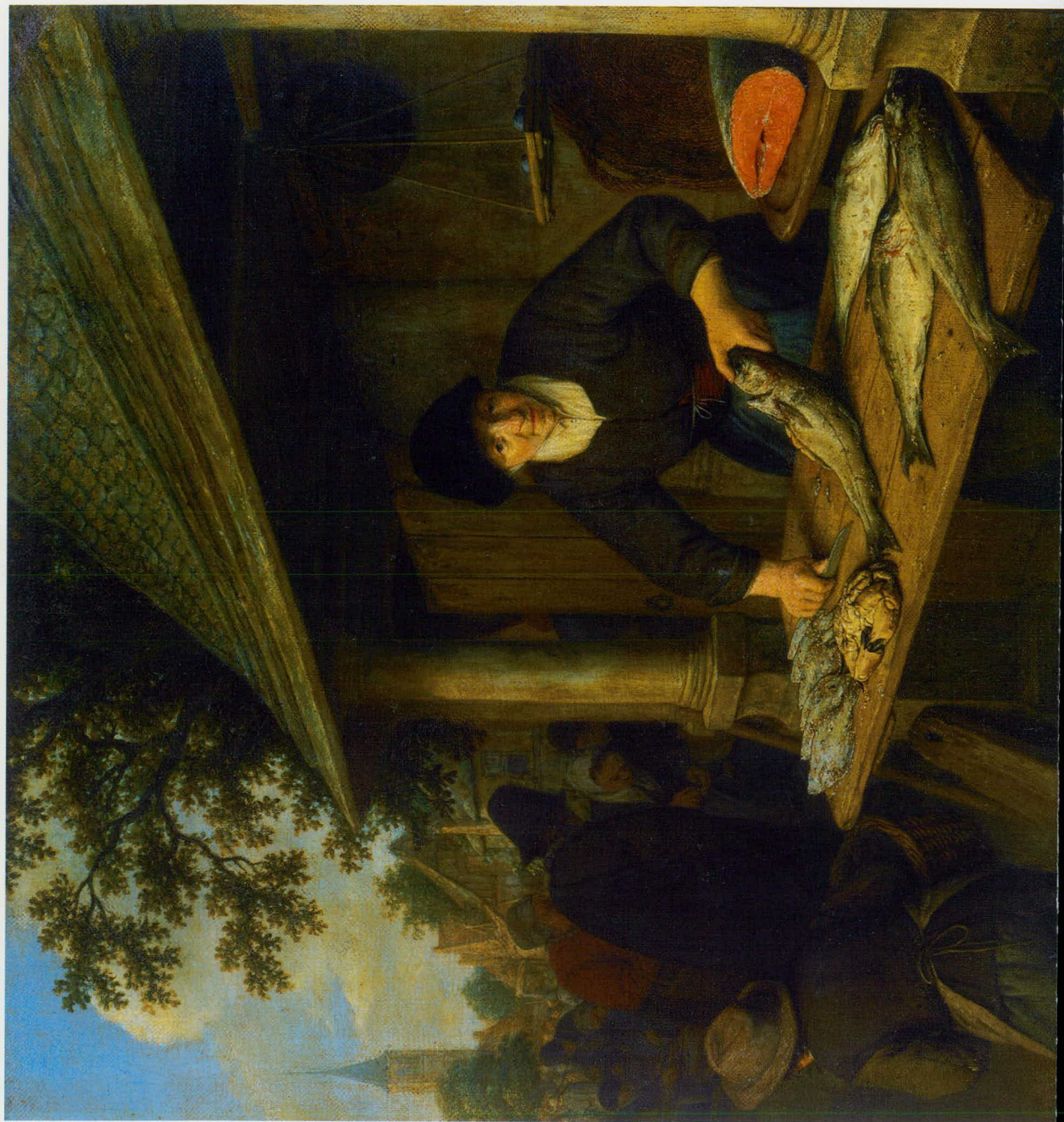
³ Robinson 1974, p. 33.

Gabriel Metsu turned his hand on several occasions to markets and other scenes, with one or more figures, involving trade in foodstuffs.¹ In his Amsterdam years (1657 until his death in 1667), the artist lived on the Prinsengracht, near a busy vegetable market.² The fish market was also close by. In a few instances, the focus in Metsu's paintings is on fish, with a young fishwife and an elderly customer or conversely a young customer and an aged fishwife, in a more or less fixed compositional scheme. Metsu belonged to the large group of seventeenth-century painters who – when it suited them – relished combining a realistic presentation with metaphorically intended details, double meanings or silent hints. However, not a single trace of this can be detected in his pictures of fishwives, nor is any fish symbolism manifest.

Some of these scenes are situated in an urban setting, however the *Fishwife* from the museum in Prague is lacking a clearly defined city decor.³ The narrow vista to the right of the house – evidently the old

woman's dwelling – opens up onto a gently rolling landscape, thus the fishwife and her customer are located somewhere beyond the city centre. Depicted is the moment when the simple purchase is made: the fishwife holds up a slice of fish, the old woman hands over a coin: an everyday transaction, one which Metsu was adept in depicting.

The fishwife wears a kind of head covering common in her line of work. Her colleagues, as portrayed by Van Ostade, Sorgh and De Witte, also sport such a hat (cat. nos. 58, 60 and 61). Incidentally, the style of the hat donned by the elderly woman opposite her does not differ significantly. The rope draped around the fishwife's body would have been used to pull the wheelbarrow standing next to her. Resting on the wheelbarrow are a board with fish offal and a filleting knife, a basket of perch and a wooden tub containing slices of fish that are difficult to identify. A few herring have been hung on the wall of the house. EdeJ



58 Adriaen van Ostade (1610-1685)

The fishwife 1672

Canvas, 36.5 x 39.5 cm. Signed and dated: AV Ostade 1672

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-A-3246

¹ Van Mander 1618, Fol. 212v.;
Bok 1994(a), pp. 121-124;
and Israel 1995, pp. 796-806.

² *Woordenboek der
Nederlandsche taal*, vol. XXI, cols.
1079, 1100-1101.

³ Mojzer 1967, no. 22.

Like the *Fish market at eventide* by Emanuel de Witte (cat. no. 61) this work by Adriaen van Ostade was produced in the war year of 1672.

The artist continued to paint during this period, even though the economy had collapsed and the art market was in a parlous state. In 1604 Karel van Mander had been astonished that there were still so many fine practitioners of 'our peace and prosperity loving art of Painting' in the Low Countries, despite the action of 'Art-destroying reckless Mars'. However, the economic situation was a good deal more critical in 1672 than in Van Mander's time, and many an artist was forced to hang up his palette and brushes. Hence it is doubtful whether at this point Van Ostade was able to find a ready market for his *Fishwife* and other works.

However, the political and economic situation had no effect whatsoever upon the artist's ability to wield his talent, as this fine little painting clearly shows. Van Ostade's rendering of the various fish – flounder or plaice, a salmon steak, four haddock, and a crab – is sufficient testament to his not inconsiderable skill. The unusual composition endows the scene with extra interest. The viewer's eye is naturally drawn primarily to the tradeswoman and her wares, although the left section of the

composition, which occupies approximately one third of the picture plane, also demands attention. The diagonal placement of the stall and figures in partial shade in the left foreground guide the eye deeper into the scene, to the rest of the crowded market.

This representation of a fishwife is not unique in Van Ostade's oeuvre, for he also painted a slightly smaller version on panel, now in the museum in Budapest. In this work the main figure appears in the same attitude, holding a knife at the ready to fillet one of her fish. Fish sellers or 'fishwives' enjoyed a somewhat dubious reputation, evident in the pejorative use of the term and its association with gossiping, scolding and abusive language that has persisted to the present day.² In 1967, almost three centuries after her emergence from Van Ostade's paint-box, the Budapest fishwife still managed to provoke a powerful and in terms of logic, utterly curious, response that seems to reflect something of this traditional reputation: 'The ugly face of this fat woman', wrote a Hungarian art historian, 'convinces one that she has spent all her life as a fishwife.'³ EdeJ



59 Godfried Schalcken (1643-1706)

Woman selling herring c. 1675-1680

Panel, 19 x 15.5 cm

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-A-2340

¹ See Beherman 1988, cat. nos. 42, 44, 143, 144, 170 and G1; and Amsterdam 1997, pp. 362-364.

² *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*, vol. IX, col. 978. The maidservant in Brekelenkam's *Fishwife* (cat. no. 60), also wears such a beauty spot.

³ See the essay by E. de Jongh in this catalogue and cf. cat. nos. 38 and 39

Godfried Schalcken was a gifted *fijnschilder*, or painter with a delicate brush, with a sense of humour and an interest in the erotic, the latter in various gradations.¹ Here too, he has veiled his appealing herring seller in an erotic atmosphere, even though one could debate the extent of his intentions in this respect. Just how common was it for fishwives to wear pearl earrings and adorn themselves with a *mouche*, or beauty patch, a piece of black taffeta artfully applied to the face in order to show off the fairness of the skin to best advantage? Schalcken, in any case, painted such a *mouche* on his model's left temple.²

The girl's somewhat sultry glance, evidently directed at an imaginary client outside the picture plane at the left, must have lent a certain ambiguity to the herring held up ever so demonstratively, at least for some viewers. Should this not have been the painter's intention, it is inconceivable that he would not have anticipated such a dual perception. Other creations by his hand with a more explicit sexual component exclude any such innocence.³ EdeJ



60 Hendrick Martensz. Sorgh (c. 1610-1670)

The fish market c. 1649-1650

Panel, 47.5 x 65 cm. Signed: M.Sorgh

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. C227

¹ Schneeman 1982, and Rotterdam 1994-1995, pp. 227-231, 299-300.

² Schneeman 1982, pp. 130-133, 214-215 (cat. no. 45). In connection with the cockler, see Ger Luijten in Amsterdam 1997, pp. 237-240.

³ See The Hague 2001, pp. 18-20. See also Vis 1996, p. 69.

⁴ See Van Zon 1986, p. 21, Vis 1996, pp. 26-27, and Eddy de Jongh in Amsterdam 1997, pp. 337-340, esp. p. 338.

In addition to portraits, kitchen pieces, genre and history scenes, the successful Rotterdam painter Hendrick Martensz. Sorgh produced a large number of market views, the best known of which are his vegetable markets. He must have been thoroughly familiar with markets since he was an officially appointed market bargeman of Dordrecht, a side job he held until his death. He lived near the mooring place of his barge, in a house along a canal in Rotterdam called the Steiger (Jetty).¹

Originating around 1649-1650, the Rijksmuseum fish market may be the earliest in the series of market pieces that Sorgh painted. Although he did not strive for topographical accuracy, he did incorporate elements typical of the subject, such as various species of fish, a fish stall, a covered market, a mussel-man with a wheelbarrow, some boats with fresh supply in the canal in the background, and a multitude of figures looking at, inspecting and buying the wares.²

The painting in no way displays the colourfulness of Sorgh's later works. The nature of the merchandise, consisting of cod, flatfish, whiting,

thornback ray and mussels, contributes to the tonal atmosphere of the painting, dominated by greys and browns. With respect to the palette, depictions of fish easily surrender to displays of vegetables and fruit, and this is certainly the case in Sorgh's oeuvre.

One of the few colour accents in *The fish market* is the long red bill of a stork at the far left, near a man leaning on the stall. Viewers today might be inclined to consider the bird in this place as unusual, but that was not the case. Various towns featured one or more tame, pinioned storks that walked around freely in order to clean up the 'grom', or offal. Sometimes a special cage was even built for them.³ Most towns had statutes dictating the cleaning up of the market place, and if all went accordingly, the local authorities saw to it that when the market closed primarily the vegetable merchants and fish dealers thoroughly removed their perishable and odoriferous refuse – whether or not assisted by a stork.⁴ Edel



61 Emanuel de Witte (1617-1692)*Fish market at eventide* 1672

Canvas, 67.5 x 75.5 cm. Signed and dated upper left: E.De Witte.fecit Ao 1672

Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, inv. no. 1992

¹ Manke 1963, pp. 54, 125 (no. 223); and Lammertse 1998, pp. 201-203 (no. 66).

² Israel 1995, pp. 796-806.

³ Lammertse 1998, p. 202.

⁴ See MacLaren 1991, pp. 489-492 (no. 3682).

⁵ Lammertse 1998, p. 202.

⁶ Cats 1661, pp. 94 and 124.

The tradeswoman at the fish market painted by Emanuel de Witte boasts an attractive stall, in which the fish on the wooden counter have been arranged with considerable flair for composition. Alongside sturgeon, cod, thornback ray and haddock there are also sole, whiting, several salmon steaks and a lobster for sale.¹ The display presents the viewer with a diversity of forms in various tones of grey, with several contrasting red accents furnished by the salmon.

The artist painted all these sea creatures in 1672, 'the most traumatic year in the Golden Age of the Republic' in the words of the historian Jonathan Israel, when the armies of Louis XIV overran the country, the Amsterdam Stock Exchange suffered its greatest crash of the early modern period, the economy slumped to an all-time low and fishing fared as poorly as most other branches of trade and industry.² Yet there is no evidence of that infamous *annus horribilis* in De Witte's painting, for he has ignored political and economic reality in a manner entirely excusable in an artist, and also encountered in work by virtually all of his colleagues. Nevertheless, certain questions remain. Was it actually possible in 1672 to go fishing on a sea made perilous by war? And, were the prices of important foodstuffs such as those depicted in De Witte's painting not driven up tremendously by the trying circumstances to which the Dutch merchant and fishing fleets were subjected?

Although De Witte specialised primarily in painting church interiors, on various occasions he also tried his hand at depicting market scenes.

Some of these works feature contemporary Amsterdam buildings, once located in the neighbourhood of the Nieuwe Vismarkt (New Fish Market) on the Haarlemmersluis. However, the tower in the background of the present painting cannot be identified, and probably sprang from the artist's imagination. This is also true of the three people in the painting: the man taking off his hat, the tradeswoman with her chopper and the finely dressed lady inspecting the fish are all characters playing a role rather than portraits of actual people.³

The creation of such a pseudo-reality was general artistic practice at the time. Nevertheless, in an exception to this rule, De Witte also painted a fish market scene that incorporated a portrait of a woman and her young daughter.⁴ It has been correctly pointed out that such a painting demonstrates that it was apparently acceptable for a well-to-do lady to be shown near a fish stall at a market, and that such depictions did not transgress the rules of decency.⁵ In 1625 the influential moralist Jacob Cats had written that making provision for food was an important task for the good housewife, giving instructions for 'how a young woman should conduct her marketing, and what should be brought into the house'.

According to Cats, who revelled in similes, the virtuous housewife was 'like unto a ship, that has sailed over sea, filling the entire land with all useful wares', an unmistakable paraphrase of Proverbs 31:14: 'She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.'⁶ Cats was not the only writer to employ this appealing metaphor, for many pious

⁷ De Jongh 1986, pp. 209-211. The painter, who was still unknown in 1986, was identified as Jan Claesz. in 1990 by Rudi Ekkart; see Ekkart 1990, pp. 193 and 214 (no. 10).

authors of the seventeenth century also used it. In 1602 the Enkhuizen painter Jan Claesz. gave striking visual expression to the analogy by incorporating a ship in a portrait of a woman.⁷

In the light of the above the question arises of whether Emanuel de Witte also applied the same metaphor in his *Fish market* of 1672. Should the sailing ship in the background be directly associated with the house-

wife selecting fish? Is this woman 'like unto a ship'? The question remains unanswered, for De Witte's iconography is considerably less compelling in this regard than that in the Jan Claesz. portrait. But it is far from inconceivable that seventeenth-century viewers of De Witte's picture would have associated the woman with the ship and perceived the well-known metaphor in this combination. EdeJ

CATALOGUE OF BOOKS

Carel Richter

La nature & diuersité des poissons,

Auec leurs pourtraicts, representez au
plus pres du naturel.

Par Pierre Belon du Mans.

A Monseigneur le Reuerendiss. Cardinal de Chastillon.

A P A R I S.

Chez Charles Estienne, Imprimeur ordinaire du Roy.

M. D. L V.

154

DE LA NATURE ET POURTRAICT

dangereux de manier de la main nue, quand il est uiuant, car il mord, comme fait la Murene. Vline le nomme Draco marinus, qui, a l'imitation d'Aristote, dit, que quand on l'a peché & secé a bord sur le sable, il n'arreste quasi rien a auoir creusé la terre de son bec, & s'eschapper des rets, & retourner en la mer, il s'enroule en circuit a la maniere des serpents terrestres. Le surplus se pourra comprendre de la suivante peinture.

155

DES POISSONS LI. I.

Ophid. Thalattios, en Grec: Serpens marinus, en Latin: Draco marinus & Ophidion, de Plin: Serpent de mer, en François.



62 Pierre Belon (1517-1564)

La nature & diversité des poissons, [...]

Paris, Charles Estienne, 1555, first French edition

Approx. 190 woodcuts of fish and other aquatic animals in the text

Woodcuts attributed to Pierre Goudet

Oblong octavo (105 x 160 mm), 40 and 448 pages

Amsterdam, Rare Fishbooks Antiquarian Booksellers

La nature & diversité des poissons, [...] is a scientific treatise discussing the names, build, kinship, behaviour and dissemination of aquatic animals.

Pierre Belon was a diplomat in the service of Cardinal François de Tournon. His position allowed him to study the fauna of the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean Sea. He briefly taught anatomy at Oxford's medical faculty in 1550. In one of his lectures he opened the abdomen of a perch and demonstrated that its heart continued beating up to two days after its dissection. Belon was a pioneer in comparative anatomy,

and his drawings of the skeleton of a human and that of a bird have become classics.

The title page mentions that Belon came from Le Mans and that the treatise is dedicated to the cardinal of Chatillon. Illustrated on page 155 is a sea serpent, a fish species described for the first time by Aristotle as found in the Mediterranean Sea. Belon assumes that it is, in fact, a conger. The fish occurs in the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea as well and reaches a maximum length of 2.75 metres. **CR**

L'HISTOIRE ENTIERE DES POISSONS.

Avec leurs pourtraits au naïf.



M. D. LVIII.

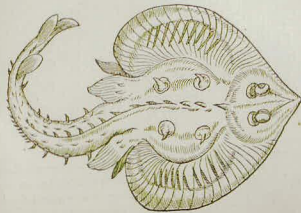
AVEC PRIVILEGE DV ROY POVR DOVZE ANS.

A detailed illustration of a ray, likely a species of stingray, shown from a dorsal view. The ray has a broad, flat, oval-shaped body with a mottled pattern of dark spots and lines. Its head is pointed, and its eyes are visible. The tail is long and slender, with a series of small, dark, pointed structures along its length. The illustration is rendered in a classic, scientific style with fine lines and shading. The text "LIVRE" is visible at the top right of the page.

de grands comme clous ou boucles, & ce du commencement de la queie illu qui milieu seulement, selon mon aduis, que queue autant de grands eus qu'on eussions fait tout roide, ne se peut flechir & tourner aisen & là, toutsous afin que nulle partie fut depreinte de goulons, après les grands s'enleuient au- dres petits comme aus autres Rats. Ilha le fieu iaumaire diuisé en deux lopins, au dedans est la bouffe du fiel chat comme eu, le foie est fort delicat & gras, tellement qu'il se peut loundre huile, le fiel est si cote les caractres. Ceste efpece de Rat pourroit estre *Aquila marina*, c'est à dire l'Aigle de mer des anciens, car au ded- sus est noire, les goulons font courbes comme les vngles de l'Aigle ilha les aels fort entendus, come l'Aigle, c'est pouillon cartilagineux & plat comme l'Aigle iso- Pline, & les autres. Outre ilha la chair fort dure, comme ont dit Galien & Philomete.

De

De la Ronce.



Chap. XIII.

QUAVATA aussi peut estre appelée ceste Raie,
C'est adire douve, ou bouclée, en l'omme en
Languedoc *Raie*. Elle est differente de la demiere,
de ce que elle ha le museau plus pointu, & n'i ha
point de queue. Aus costes elle ha des arestes au
dessus de la peau, ce que n'ont toutes les autres Raies. Au dos ha
quatre egalions comme cloux ou boucles. En la ligne du milieu
du dos i a d'autres egalions jusques aux pinnules de la queue, aus
costes de la queue i a des egalions comme cloux ou boucles
jusques au milieu, au reste sont comme ceux des autres
Raies. Elle est de couleur cédree, de chair dure, et
seut le feru. Ce ne peut estre le poisson nô-
m*me*. *Bo marini*, le Beuf de mer, car
comme escrit Oppian il
ha des dens, ce que
n'ha ceste
Raie.

No

63 Guillaume Rondelet (1507-1566)

L'histoire entiere des poissons [...]

Lion, Macé Bonhome, 1558, first French edition

Approx. 420 woodcuts in the text

Drawings probably by Guillaume Rondelet and possibly engraved by Georges Reverdi

Folio (195 x 293 mm), 16, 583, 25, 12, 242 and 10 pages

Amsterdam, Artis Library, University of Amsterdam

L'histoire entiere des poissons [...] is a scientific treatise discussing the names, build, kinship, behaviour and classification of fish in the animal kingdom. The medicinal qualities of fish and its culinary preparation were sometimes included in the descriptions of the species.

Guillaume Rondelet was a professor in comparative anatomy at the medical faculty in Montpellier from 1545 to 1566. At his request, France's

first anatomical laboratory was founded in his university town by Henri II in 1556. Rondelet was fascinated by aquatic animal life. His books on fish set the tone in zoology until the end of the seventeenth century.

The title page bears the vignette of the publisher Macé Bonhome, a scene of Perseus with the severed head of Medusa. Illustrated on pages 280 and 281 are thornback rays. **CR**

64 Ippolito Salviani (1514-1572)

Aquatilium animalium historiae [...]

Rome, 1554-1558, first edition October 1557

Engravings of 95 fish and 4 squid on 81 sheets

Nicolas Beatricetto, Antoine Lafréry and Bernardus Aretinus may have been involved in the production of the engravings as draughtsman and/or engraver.

Folio (282 x 412 mm), 8 and 256 pages

Amsterdam, Rare Fishbooks Antiquarian Booksellers

Aquatilium animalium historiae [...] was a standard treatise on fish in the Renaissance. In it are described many previously unknown species.

Ippolito Salviani was a professor of medicine in Rome and physician to popes Julius III, Marcellus II and Paul II. Most of the fish in his book were purchased at the market in the Eternal City. The various species are meticulously drawn with the exception of the scales, which are often

only sketchily depicted. Salviani printed the engravings on his own press.

The title page bears the coat of arms of Marcello Cervini, the later pope Marcellus II, and in the centre is Salviani's medallion, flanked by two mermaids. Illustrated on page 64 is an eel. Traces of the draughtsman's and the engraver's signature are present. **CR**

65 Conrad Gessner (1516-1566)

Historiae Animalium liber IIII. Qui est de Piscium & Aquatiliu[m] [...]

Zurich, Christof Froschauer, 1558, first edition

Approx. 700 woodcuts in the text

Draughtsman and engraver unknown

Folio (238 x 389 mm), 40 and 1297 pages

Amsterdam, Rare Fishbooks Antiquarian Booksellers

The *Historiae Animalium [...]* is an animal encyclopaedia for an educated audience. The fourth volume discusses the aquatic animals in alphabetical order, including mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, crabs, lobsters and molluscs.

Conrad Gessner was a scholar who studied various fields of science. He wrote the *Bibliotheca universalis*, an inventory of all of the writings in his time, which was subsequently used by the Vatican to compile an index of forbidden books. The Holy Office also included Gessner's animal

encyclopaedia in this index. Gessner was a professor in Greek literature in Lausanne from 1537 to 1540, after which he spent a year studying medicine with Guillaume Rondelet in Montpellier, finally establishing himself as a physician in Zurich.

The title page bears the vignette of the publisher Christof Froschauer, a scene of a frog being ridden by a child. Illustrated on page 778 is a turbot. **CR**

66 Johannes Jonston (1603-1675)

Naeukeurige beschryving van de natuur [...]

Amsterdam, J.J. Schipper, 1660, first Dutch edition

Approx. 600 engravings of fish on 48 sheets

Matthias Merian, draughtsman and engraver

Folio (237 x 377 mm), 8, 194, 8, 179, 1, 56, 181, 3, 8, 152, 39 and 1 pages

Amsterdam, Rare Fishbooks Antiquarian Booksellers

The Naeukeurige beschryving van de natuur [...] is an animal encyclopaedia for laymen. The illustrations in the chapter on fish are provided with the Latin names and often also the old Dutch common names.

Of Scottish descent, Johannes Jonston earned his doctor's degree in medicine at the University of Leiden. His encyclopaedia was published between 1649 and 1662 in Latin, and translated into Dutch by M. Grauius, a physician in Amsterdam. In 1663, this edition was presented by

the Dutch East India Company to the Japanese sovereign Shogun Yoshimune in Decima.

The title page is decorated with mermen, mermaids, children and aquatic animals. The sailing ship on a stormy sea in the medallion is the vignette of the publisher Schipper (= Captain or Skipper). Illustrated on page 2 at the top are a cod (*Asellus Cabeliau Bolck*) and a hake (*Asellus alter sine Merluctus*). **CR**



67 Adriaen Collaert (c. 1560-1618)

Piscium vivae icones [...]

Antwerp, Adriano Collardo, c. 1610

14 of 25 engravings of aquatic animals

Body colour with gold leaf accents

Adriaen Collaert, draughtsman and engraver

Oblong quarto (123 x 188 mm), 26 pages

Louvain, Catholic University of Louvain Library

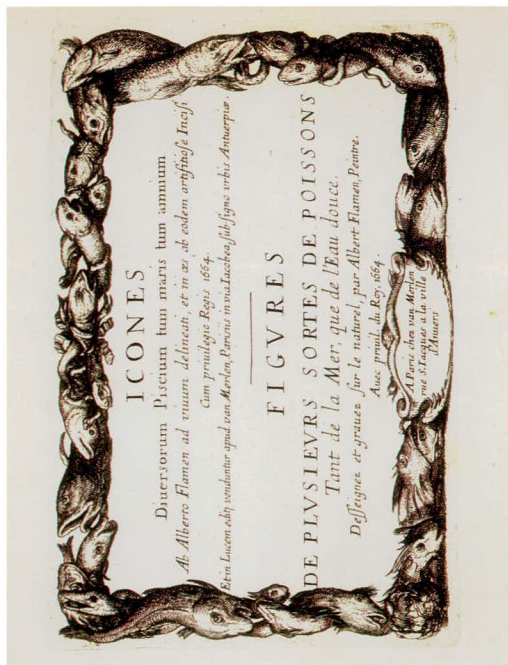
The album *Piscium vivae icones [...]* is a fish guide for nature lovers.

The Latin names of the species are given in the engravings.

Adriaen Collaert was a draughtsman, engraver, publisher and print dealer in Antwerp. He produced a comprehensive and original oeuvre of approximately 600 engravings of landscapes with quadrupeds, birds and fish. In addition, Collaert copied many works by Dutch painters. For example, he made engravings of landscapes with religious scenes

by Hans Bol (1534-1593), *The Four Continents* by Marten de Vos (1532-1603) and *John the Baptist in the desert* by Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617).

The title page shows Neptune as well as fish nets, fish, lobsters and turtles. Illustrated on the right page are a twaite shad (*Alosa*) and a sturgeon (*Acipenser*) among others. **CR**



68 Albert Flamen (?-?)

Icones Diversorium Piscium [...]

Paris, J. van Merlen, 1664

66 engravings of aquatic animals

Albert Flamen, draughtsman and engraver

Oblong quarto (106 x 178 mm), 72 pages

't Goy-Houten, Forum Antiquarian Booksellers

The album *Icones Diversorium Piscium [...]* is a fish guide for nature lovers. The Latin and French names of the animal species are mentioned below many of the engravings. The book includes separate title pages for the six consecutive series of engravings.

A native of Bruges, Albert Flamen was a painter, draughtsman and an engraver of landscapes with mammals, birds and fish. The plants

determining the habitat of the animal species are minutely depicted in various illustrations. Flamen's date of birth and death are unknown. He was active in Paris from 1648 to 1669.

The general title page of the *Icones Diversorium Piscium [...]* is embellished with a border of a braided garland of fish. Illustrated on the right sheet are three chubs and two anglers. **CR**

69 Ulysis Aldrovandi (1522-1605)

De piscibus libri V et de cetis lib. Unus [...]

Bologna, Apud Nicolaum Thebaldinum, 1638, second edition

Approx. 400 woodcuts of fish, whales and sea monsters in the text

Draughtsman and engraver unknown

Folio (236 x 358 mm), 6, 732 and 28 pages

Amsterdam, Rare Fishbooks Antiquarian Booksellers

De piscibus libri V et de cetis lib. Unus [...] is an animal encyclopaedia for educated readers in which fish, whales and monsters from lakes and seas are treated.

Ulysis Aldrovandi, a professor of natural history at the University of Bologna, invested a great deal of time and money in compiling a 16-volume encyclopaedia of plants and animals. The fifth volume on fish, *De piscibus libri V et de cetis lib. Unus [...]*, was left unfinished at

Aldrovandi's death in 1605. Johannes Cornelis Uterverius from Delft succeeded him in his post and published the opus.

The title page contains a heraldic scene with mermen, children and aquatic animals. The names of Ulysis Aldrovandi and Ioannes Cornelius Uterverius are incorporated in the title. On page 584 is illustrated a salmon. **CR**

70 Anonymous

Bairische Landts Ordnung

Ingolstadt, 1553, first and only edition

12 woodcuts of fish, a lobster and a ruler on fold-out sheets

Draughtsman and engraver unknown

Folio (213 x 327 mm), 18, 1, 19-125, 1, 126-197 and 20 pages

Amsterdam, Rare Fishbooks Antiquarian Booksellers

The *Bairische Landts Ordnung* is a civil code for the province of Bavaria. The regulations apply to subjects such as civil law, capital offences, trade, public health, and the purity of beer and wine. The texts afford insight into sixteenth-century German mentality. The *Reinheitsgebot* – the regulation for the purity of Bavarian beers – and the exact specifications governing fishery are examples of this.

The title page presents Duke Albrecht III seated on a throne with his subjects receiving the civil code from his hands. On the unfolded sheet is a bream, a species of fish eaten by rich and poor alike in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. **CR**

71 Willem Piso (1611-1678) and Georg Marcgrave (1610-1644)

Historia naturalis Brasiliae [...]

Lugduni Batavorum, apud Franciscum Hackium; Amstelodami, apud Lud. Elzevirium, 1648, first edition

Approx. 490 engravings of plants and animals in the text

Draughtsman possibly Georg Marcgrave, engraver unknown

Folio (231 x 358 mm), 12, 122, 2, 8, 293 and 7 pages

Amsterdam, Rare Fishbooks Antiquarian Booksellers

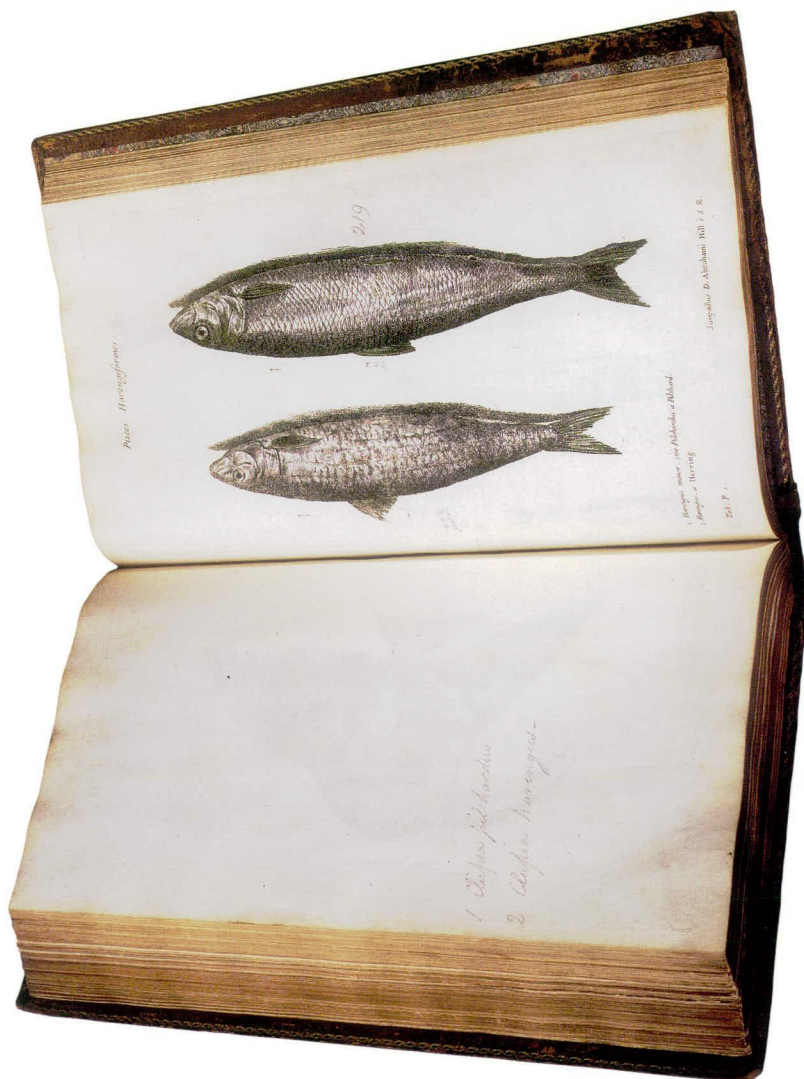
The *Historia naturalis Brasiliae [...]* is the first book ever devoted to the nature, agriculture and public health of North Brazil.

Willem Piso studied medicine in Leiden. He was in North Brazil from 1637 to 1644, where he investigated the country's medicine and mineralogy. Georg Marcgrave studied natural sciences in the same Dutch city and went to Brazil to collaborate with Piso. Marcgrave investigated the flora and fauna and may well have produced the drawings of the plants and animals for this book. The original depictions were done in oils

on paper, and are now kept in the Jagiellon Library in Cracow (Poland).

The painter Albert Eckhout (c. 1610-c. 1666) was in Brazil in the same period and probably made these oil paintings.

The title page displays an allegorical scene of a river god with natives, tropical plants and animals. The Guamajacu apé (*Acanthostracion quadricornis*) on page 142 and the Guacucua (*Ogocephalus vespertilio*) on page 143 were newly identified species. **CR**



72 Francis Willughby (1635-1672) and John Ray (1627-1705)

De Historia Piscium libri IV [...]

Londini, C. Davis, 1743, a reprint of the 1686 edition

Several hundred engravings of fish and whales

Draughtsman and engraver unknown

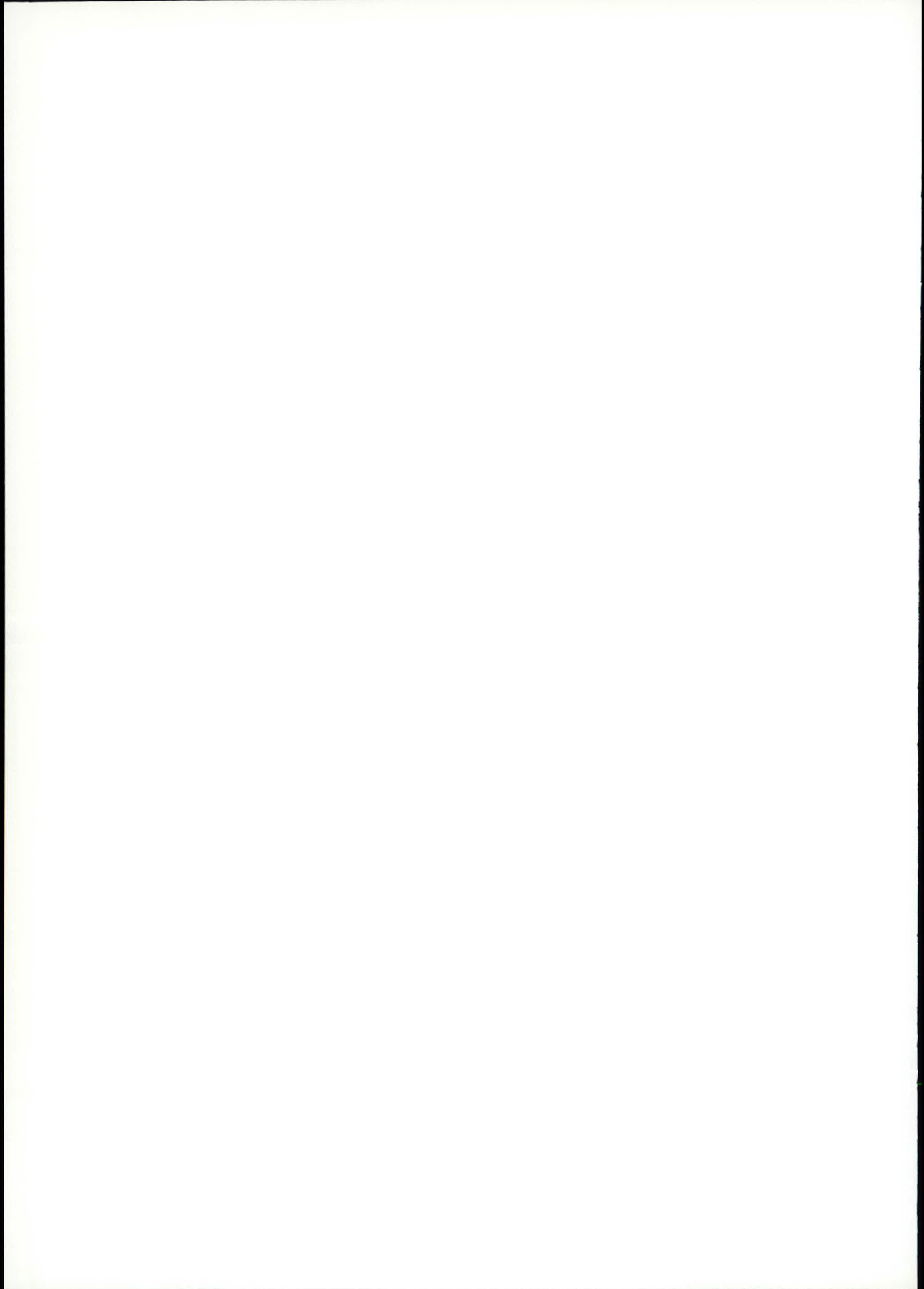
Folio (235 x 377 mm), 8, 344, 32, 12 and 12 pages

Amsterdam, Rare Fishbooks Antiquarian Booksellers

De Historia Piscium libri IV [...] is a scientific treatise in which the classification of fish and whales in the animal kingdom was amended. It was long the leading book for the taxonomy of fish until it was revised by Carolus Linnaeus in 1758.

Francis Willughby studied zoology at the University of Cambridge from 1652 to 1659, during which years John Ray worked as a theologian for the Church of England. Ray left the church in 1661 to study botany and zoology, also at Cambridge. Willughby and Ray became acquainted there and decided to jointly conduct research on fish and birds.

The title page is an engraving, drawn and engraved by Paul Van Somer depicting a plentiful catch on a boat in a harbour. Illustrated on sheet Tab. P1 are a pilchard and a herring. Most of the engravings in the book were taken from the works of Renaissance scholars. New illustrations for Willughby and Ray's opus, like these of the pilchard and the herring, were marked with a dagger. The name of D. Abrahami Hill, member of the Royal Society, is printed at the lower right side of the sheet. He financed the preparation of the two engravings. **CR**



The fish illustrated in the catalogue were identified by Lex Raat, with the help of Johan Merkx, Gé van Beek, and Tim Vriese.

The numbers in the schematic drawings of the paintings refer to the fish mentioned below.

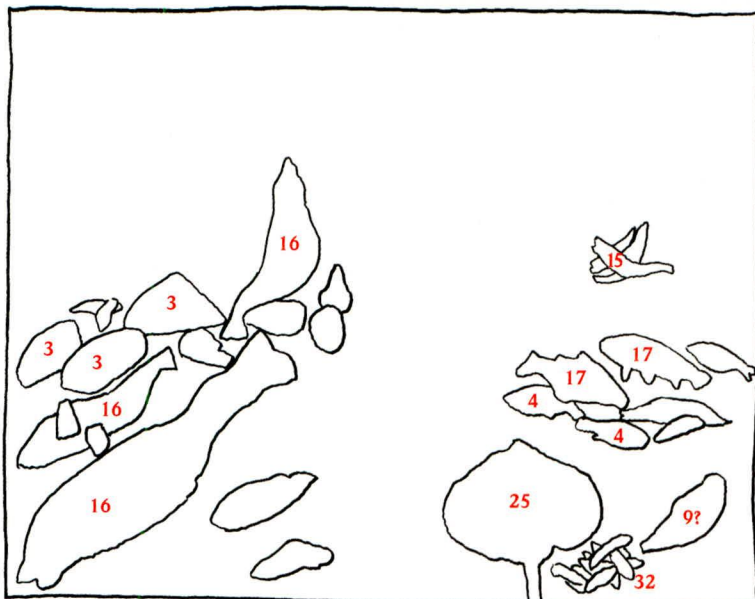
- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1 eel | 21 ruff |
| 2 sturgeon | 22 rudd |
| 3 salmon | 23 lampern |
| 4 perch | 24 tub gurnard |
| 5 barbel | 25 rays: thornback ray, smooth/spotted skate or blonde ray |
| 6 european brook lamprey | 26 haddock |
| 7 roach | 27 plaice |
| 8 flounder | 28 sea snail |
| 9 bream | 29 northern pike |
| 10 allis shad | 30 lumpsucker |
| 11 twaite shad | 31 smelt |
| 12 trout | 32 sprat |
| 13 garfish | 33 turbot, brill or halibut |
| 14 grey gurnard | 34 sole |
| 15 herring | 35 whiting |
| 16 cod | 36 ide |
| 17 common carp | 37 longspined sea scorpion or bull rout |
| 18 silver bream | 38 tench |
| 19 chub | 39 lamprey |
| 20 burbot | 40 catfish |

FOLD-OUT PAGE

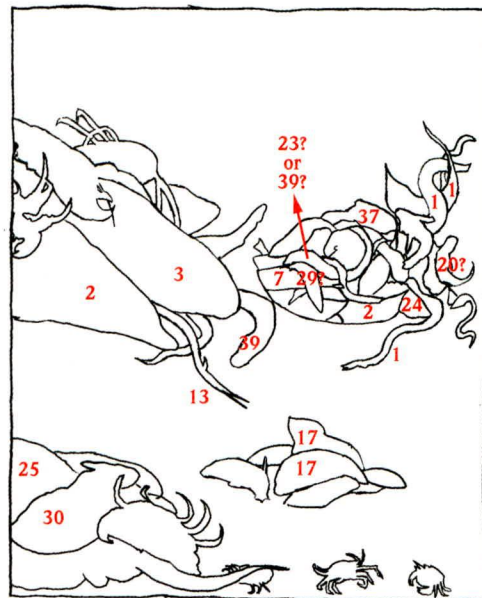
IDENTIFICATION OF THE FISH

IN THE CATALOGUE OF PAINTINGS

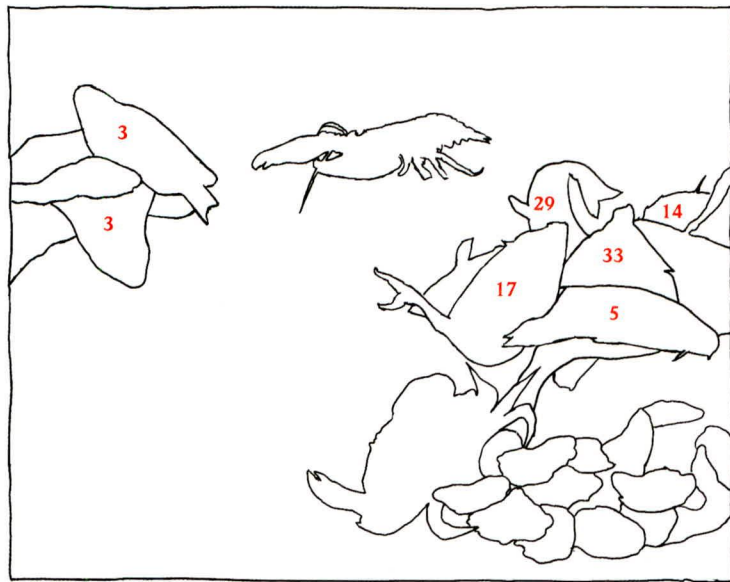
Lex Raat

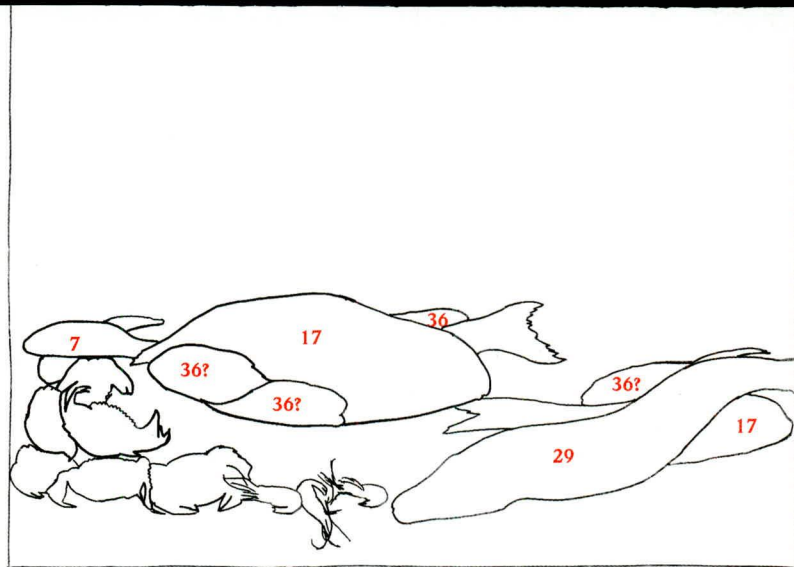


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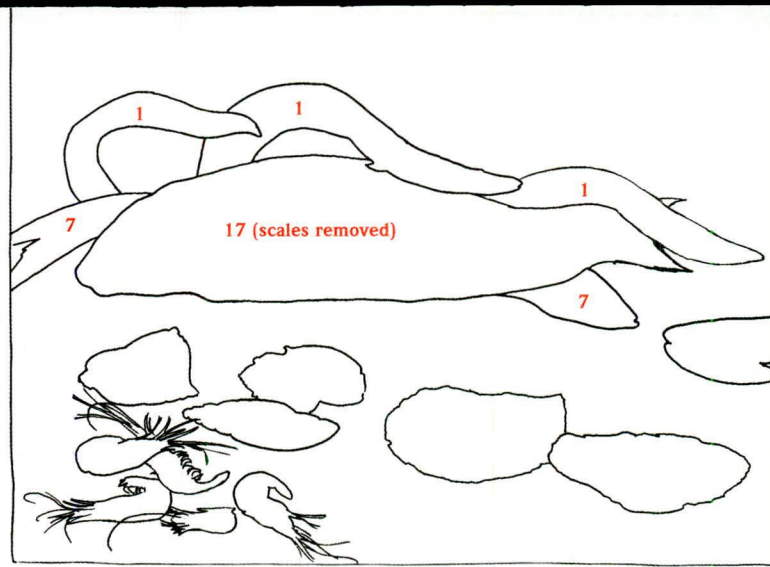


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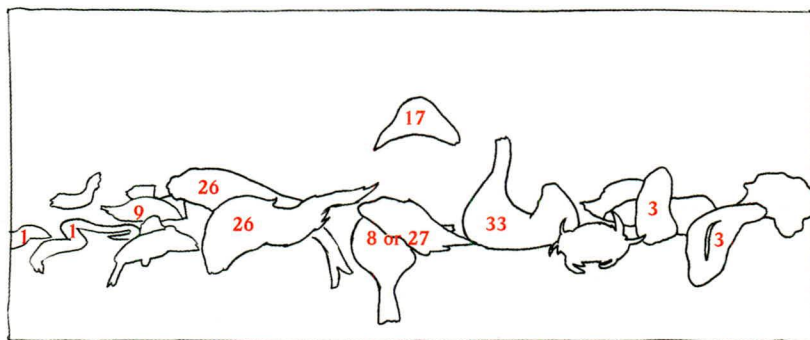




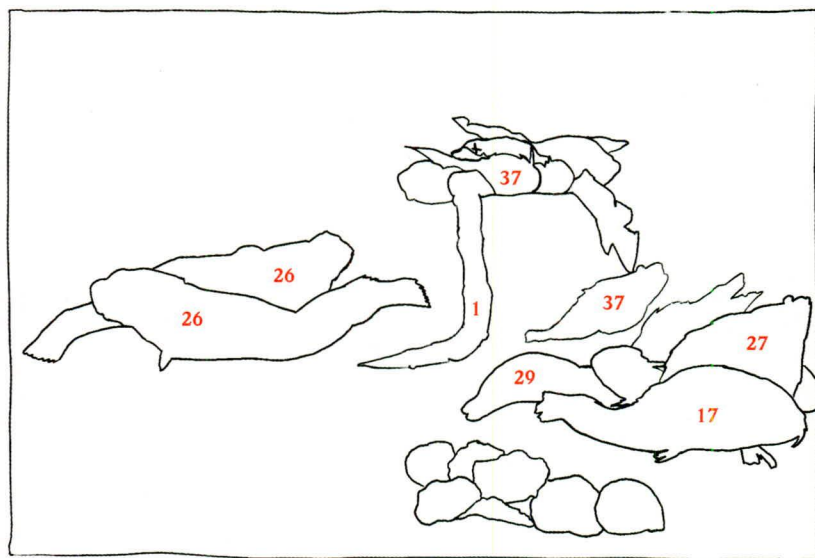
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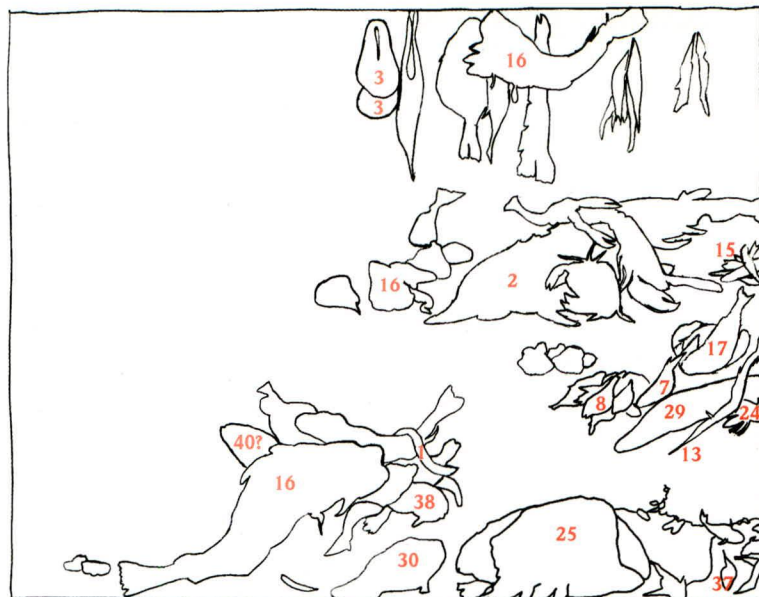
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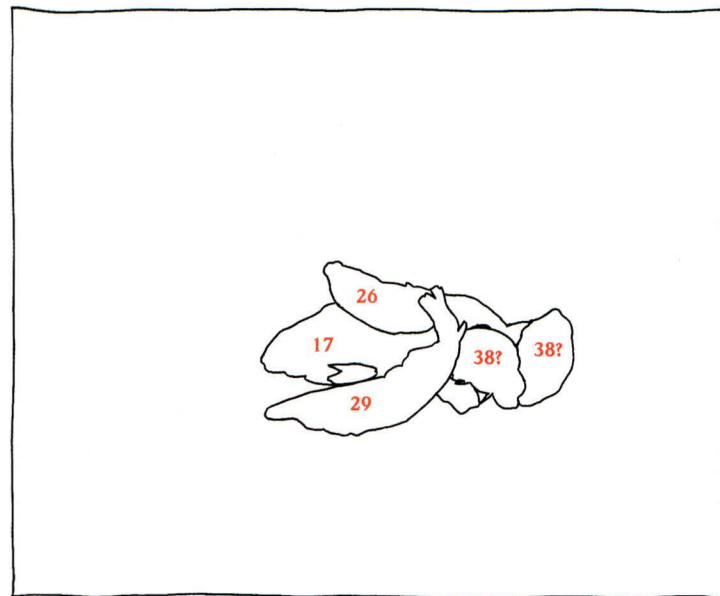
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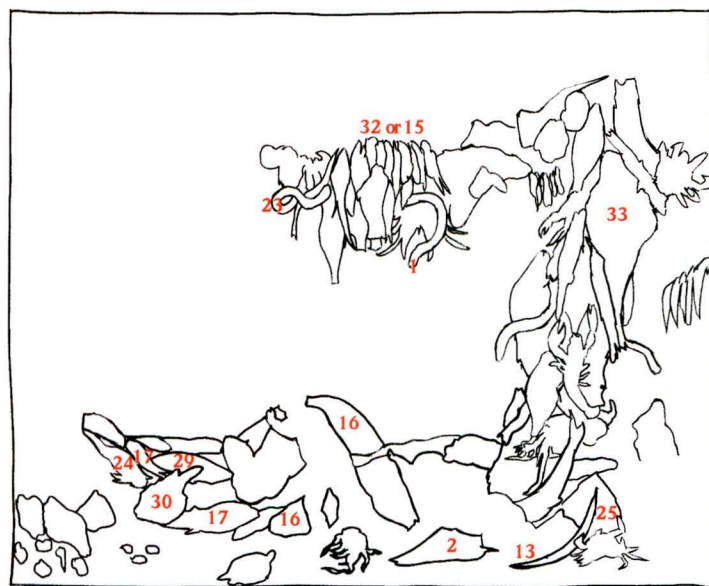
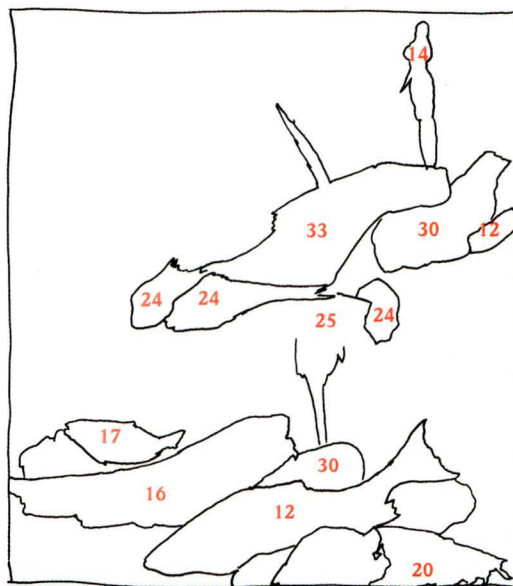
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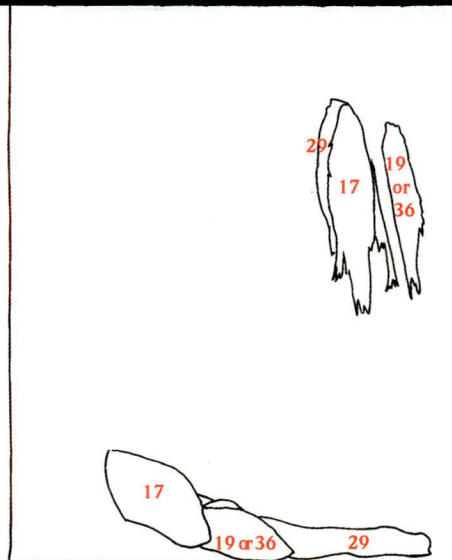


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cat. no. 10

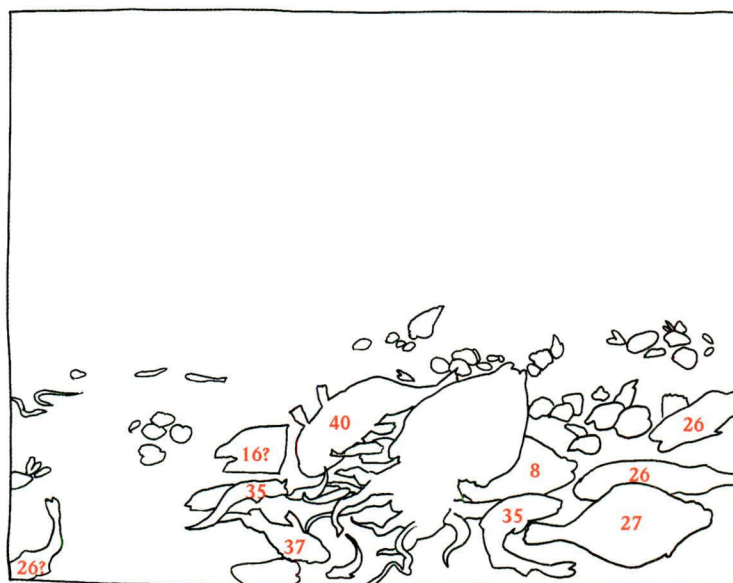




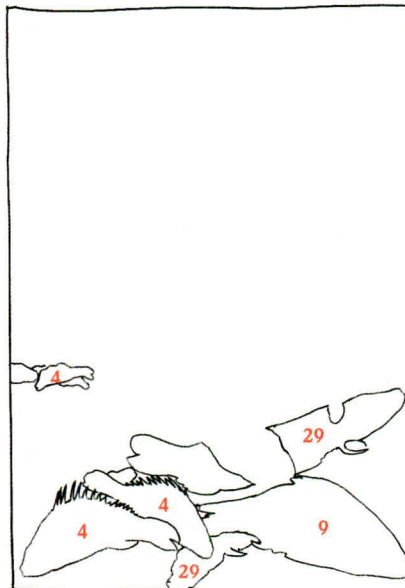
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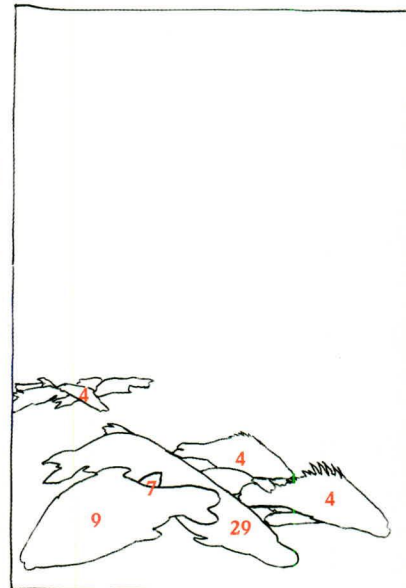
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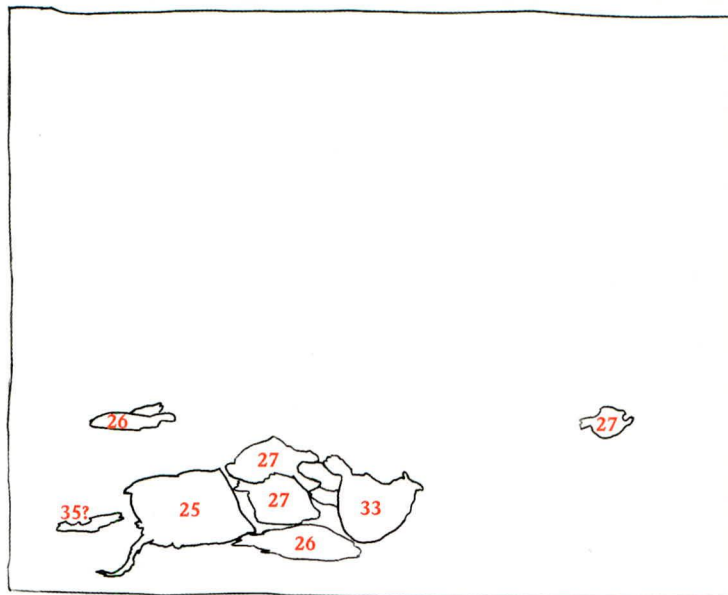


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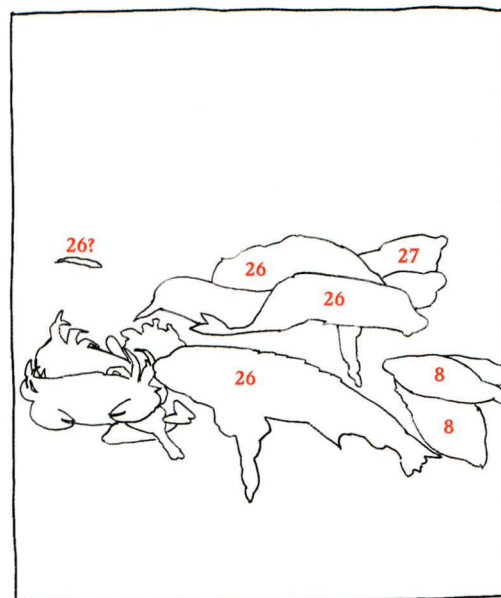


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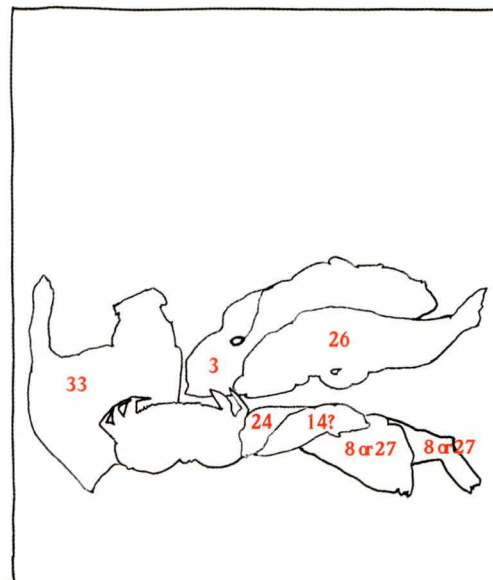
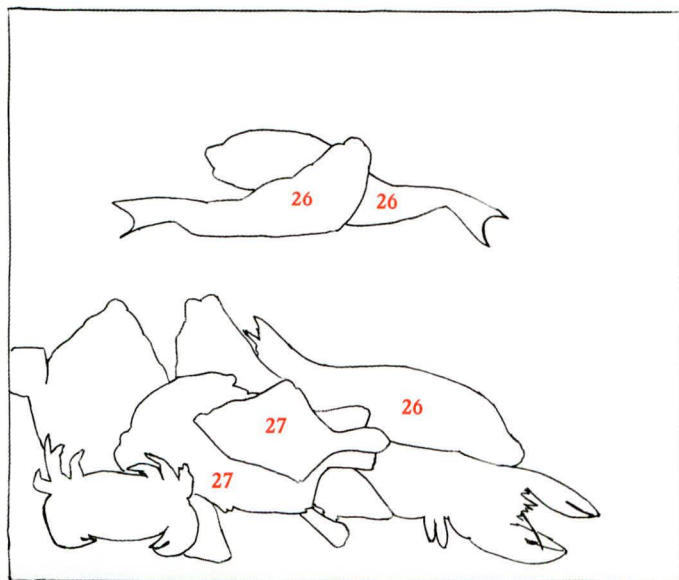




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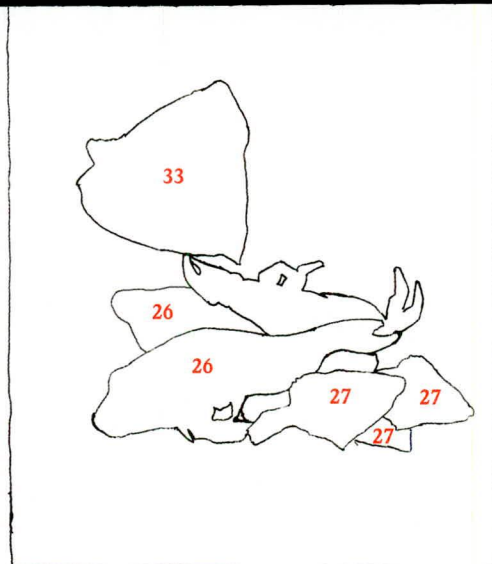


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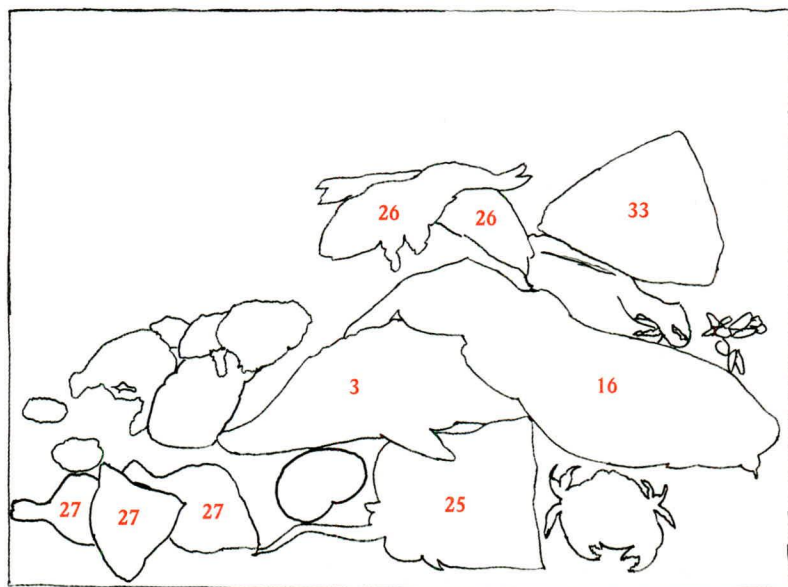




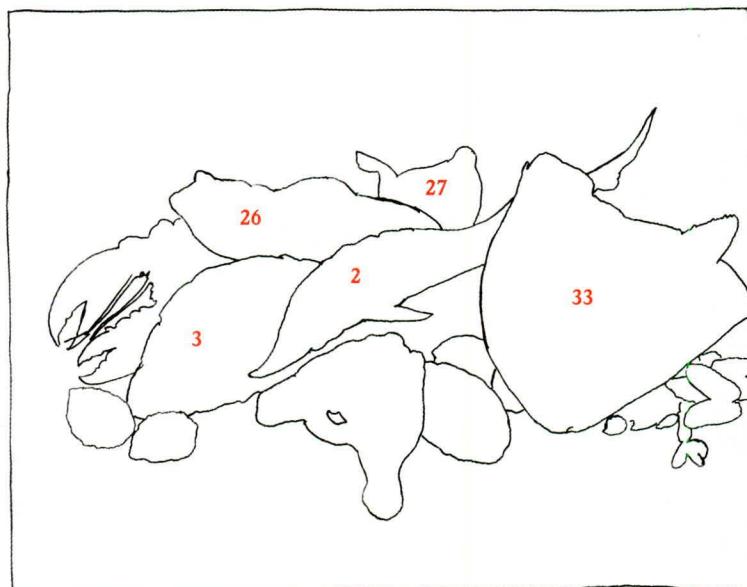
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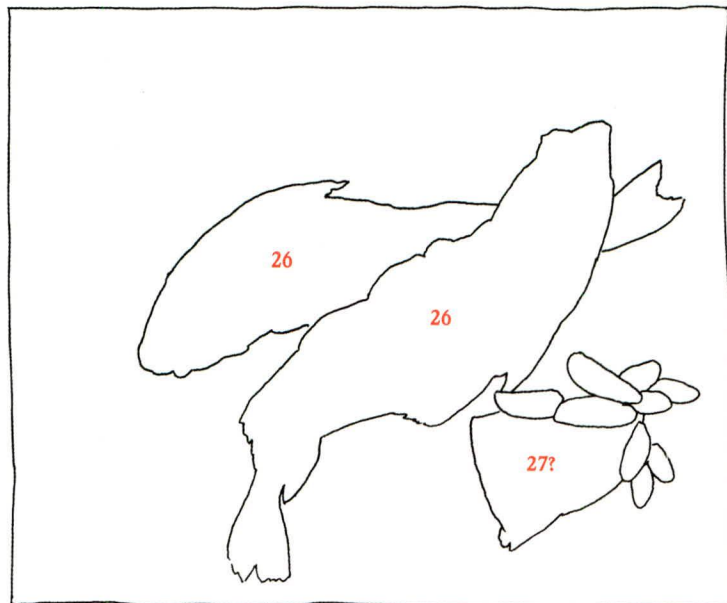
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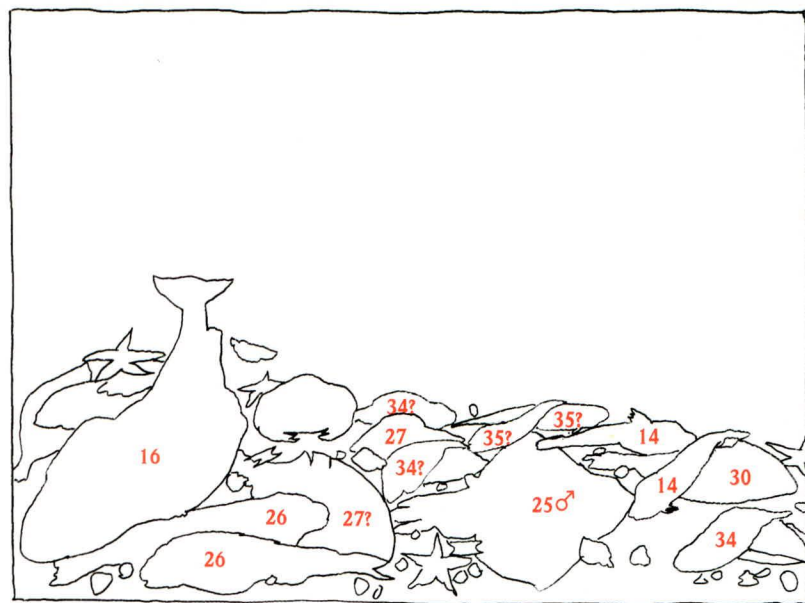
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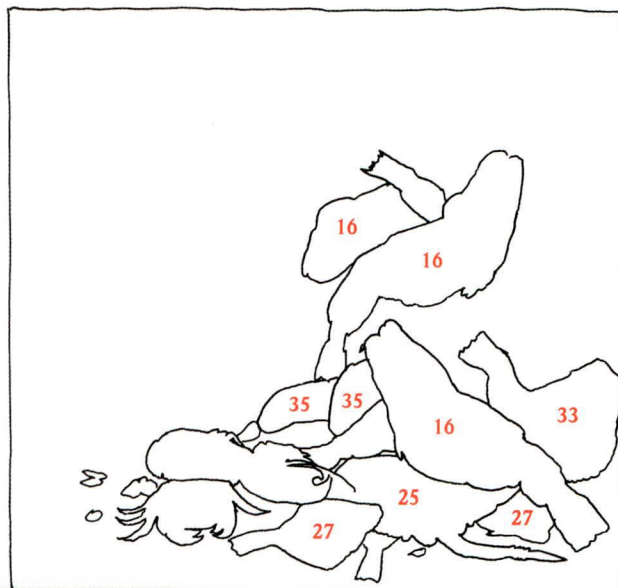
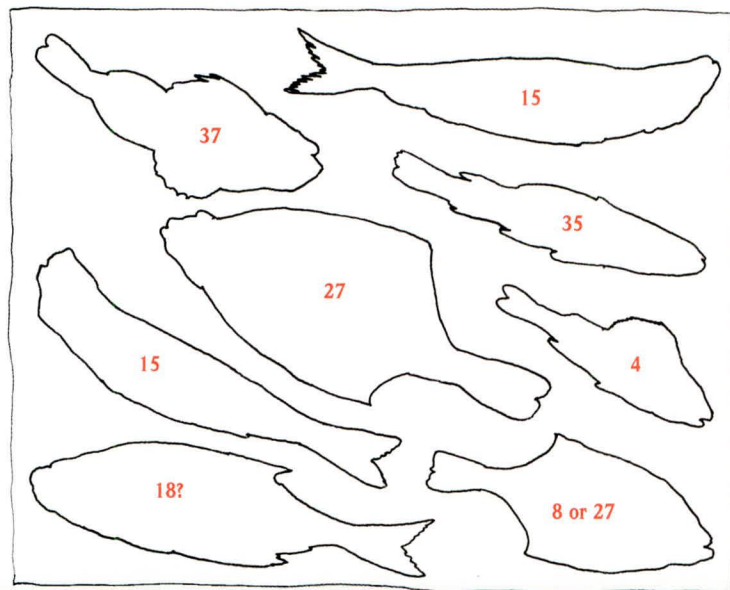
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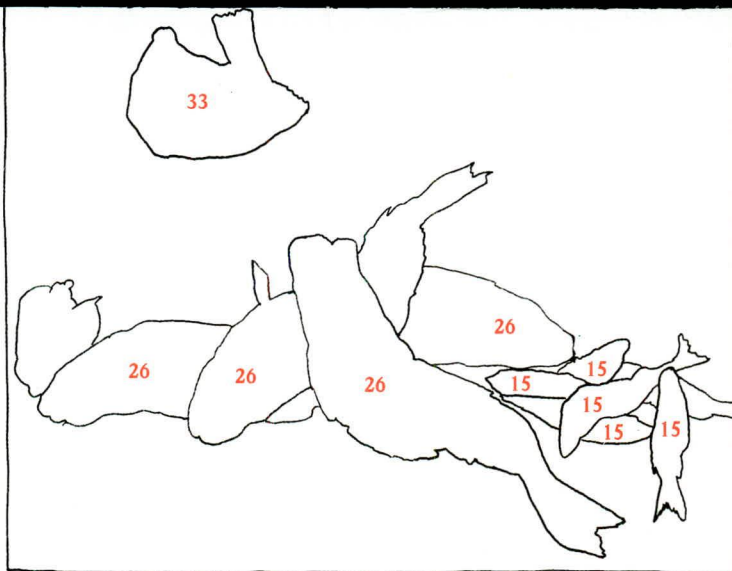


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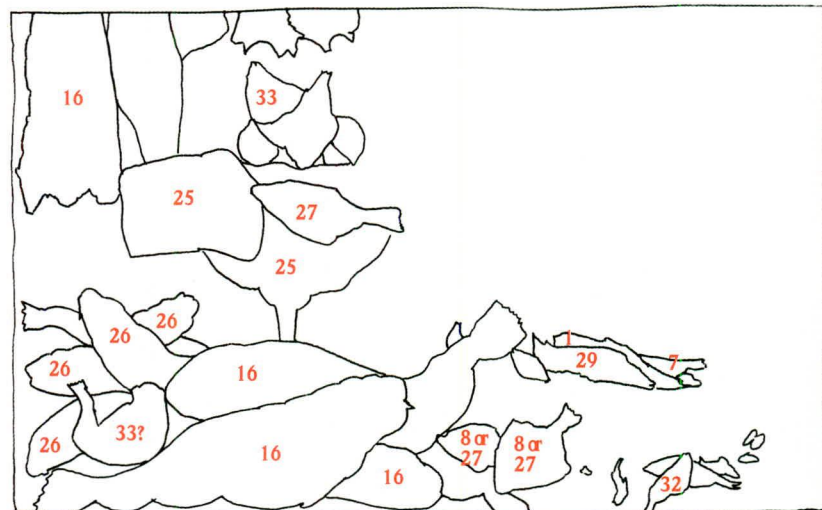


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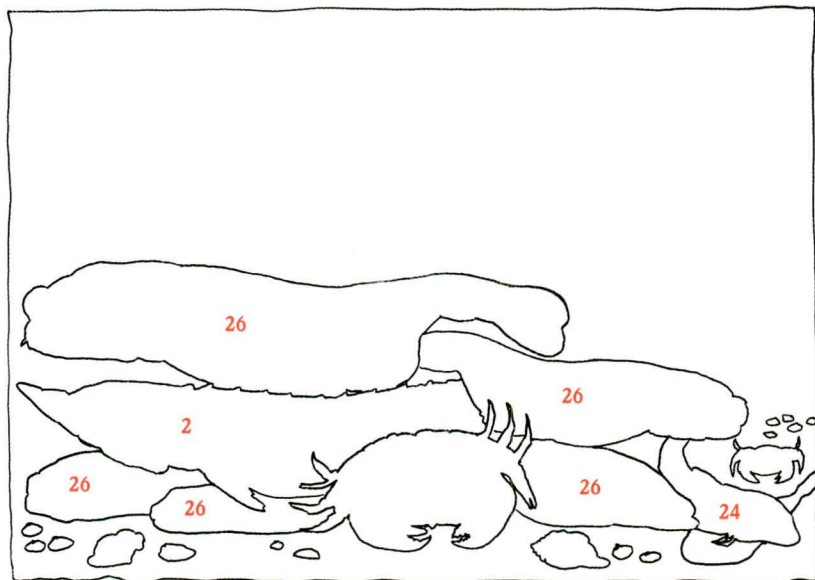




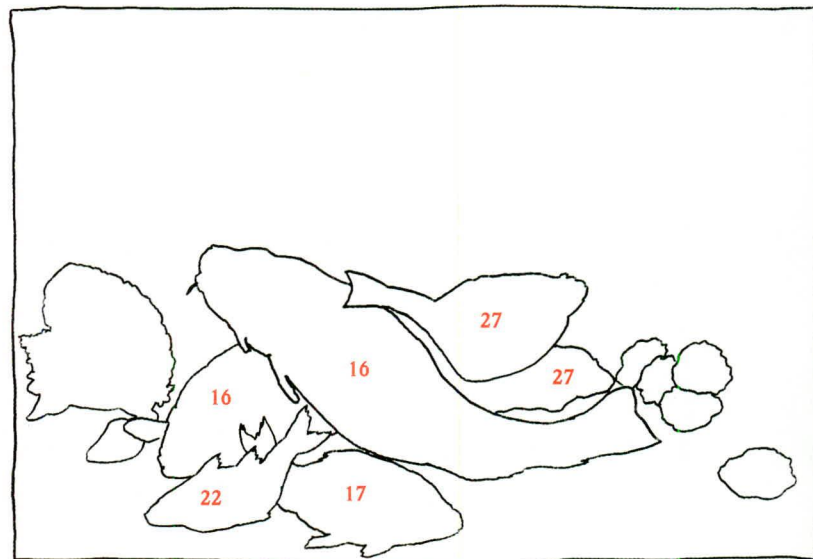
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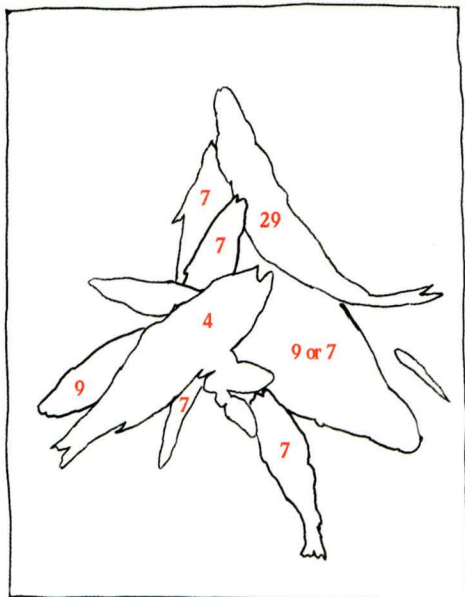
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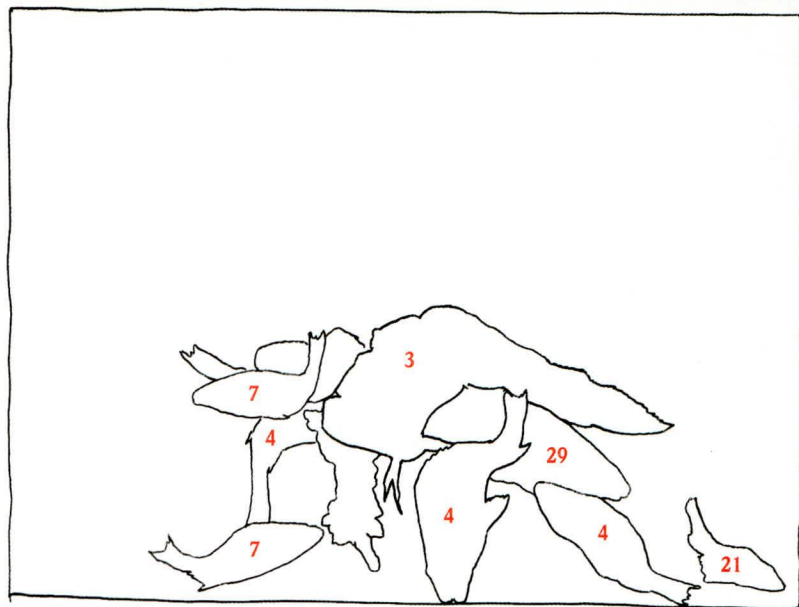
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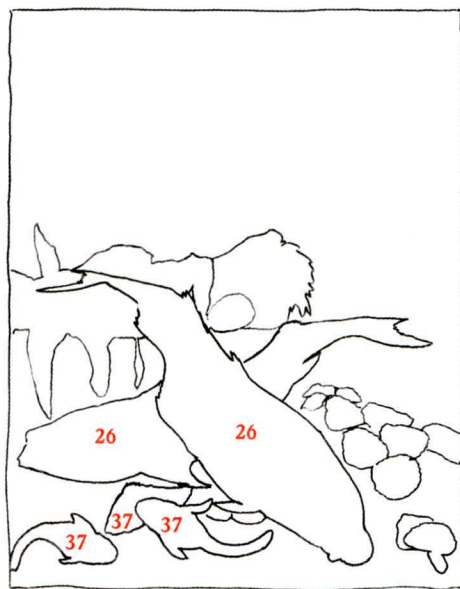
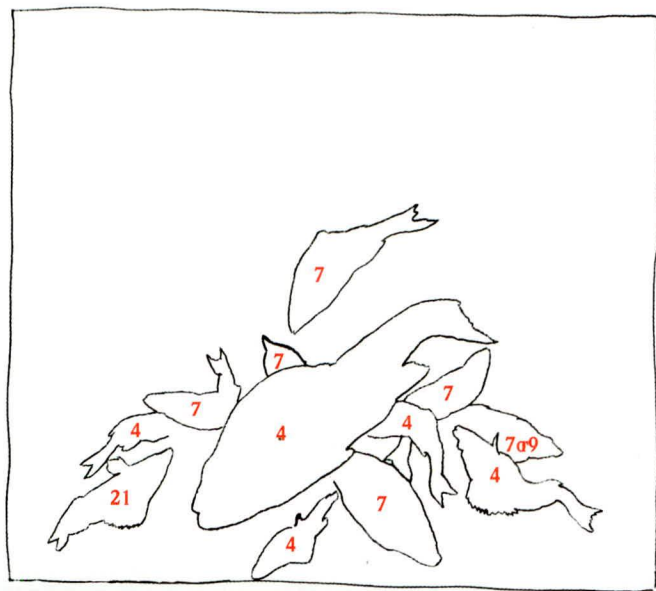
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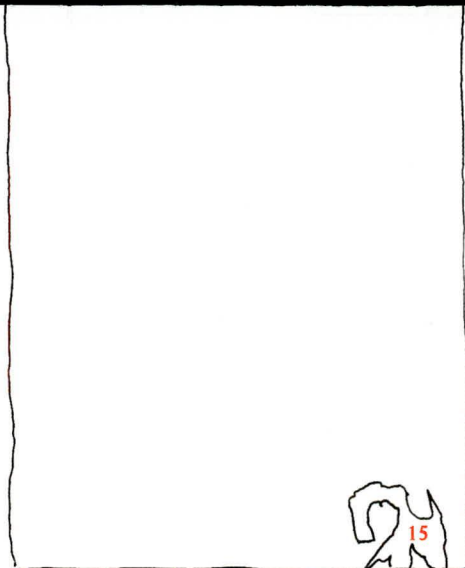


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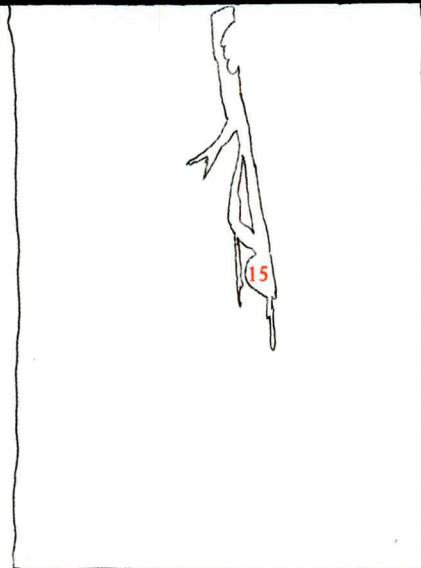


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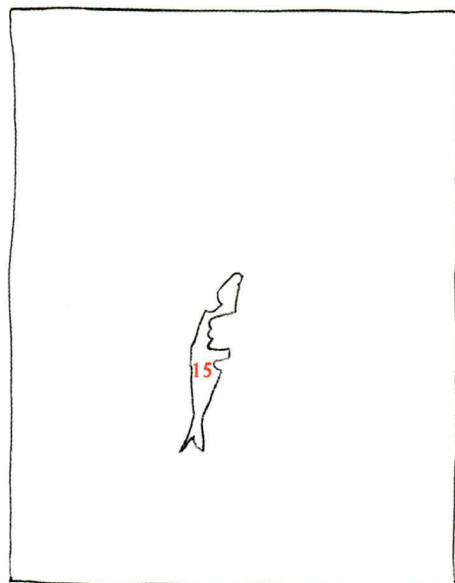




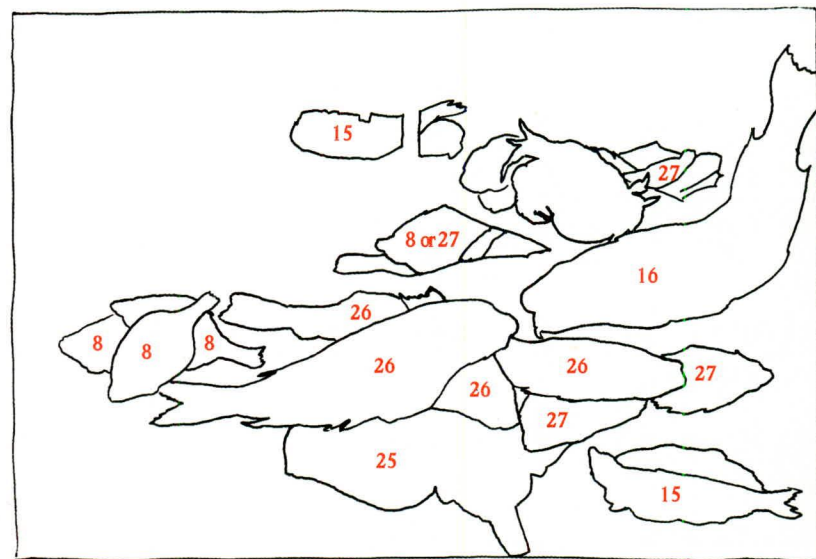
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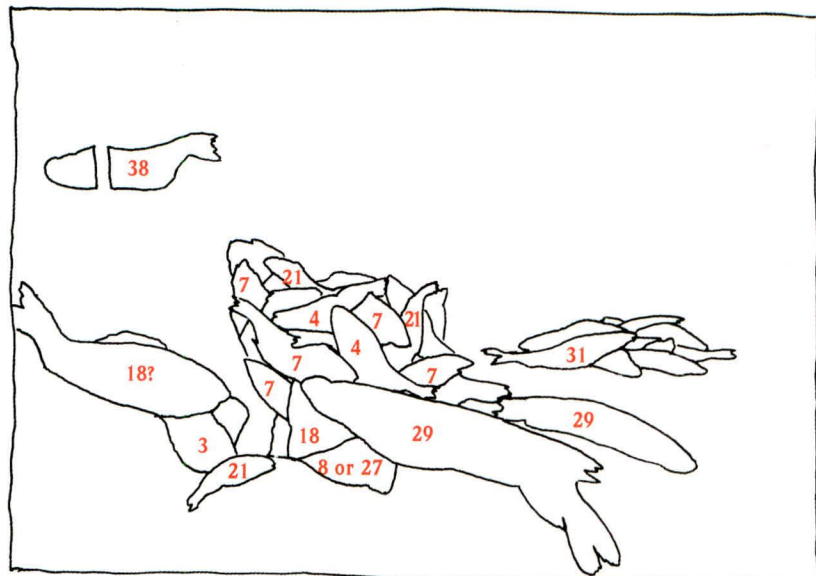
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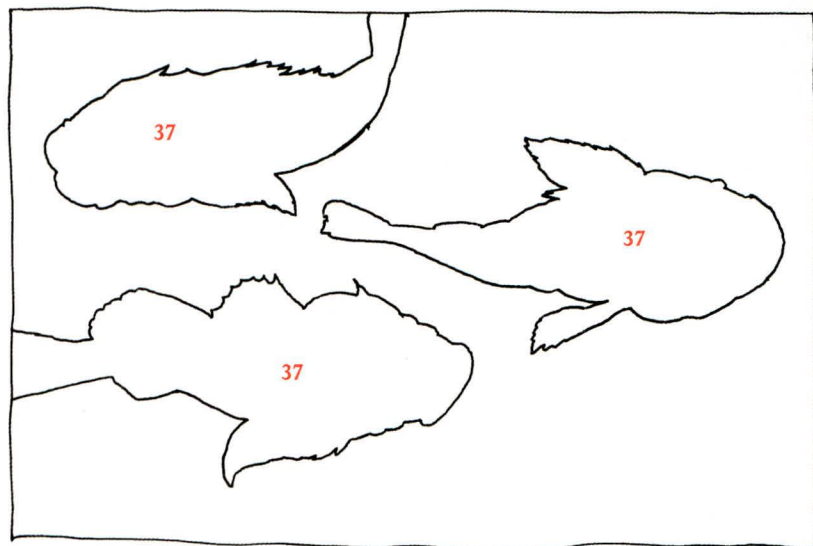
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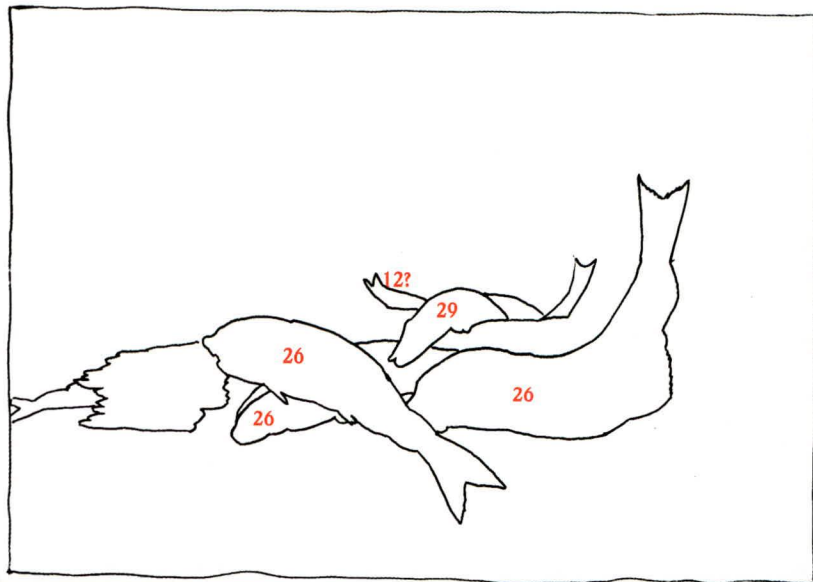
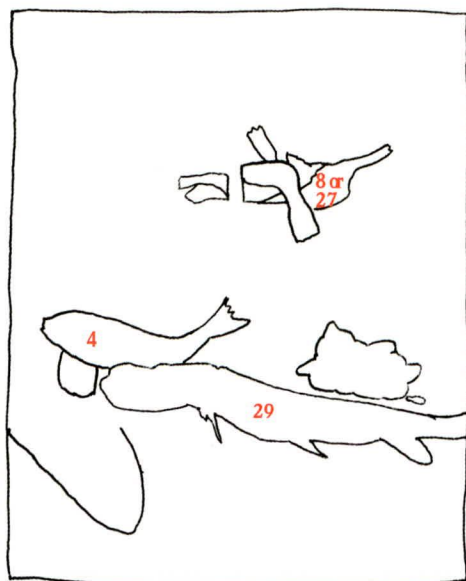
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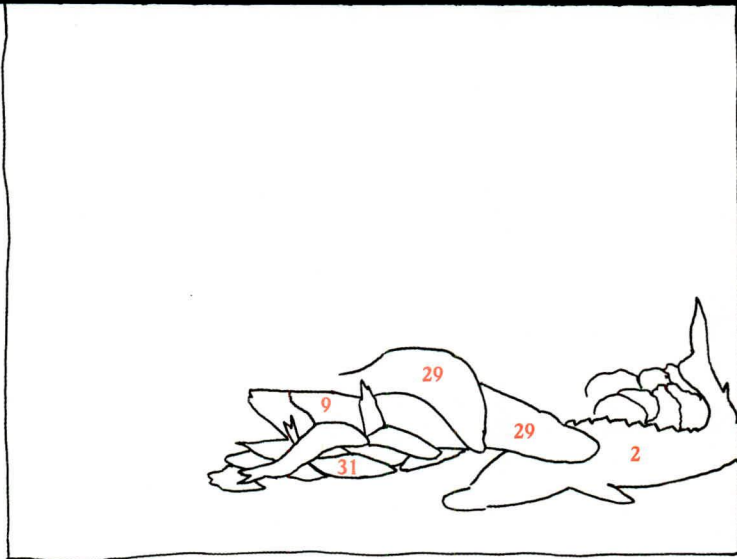


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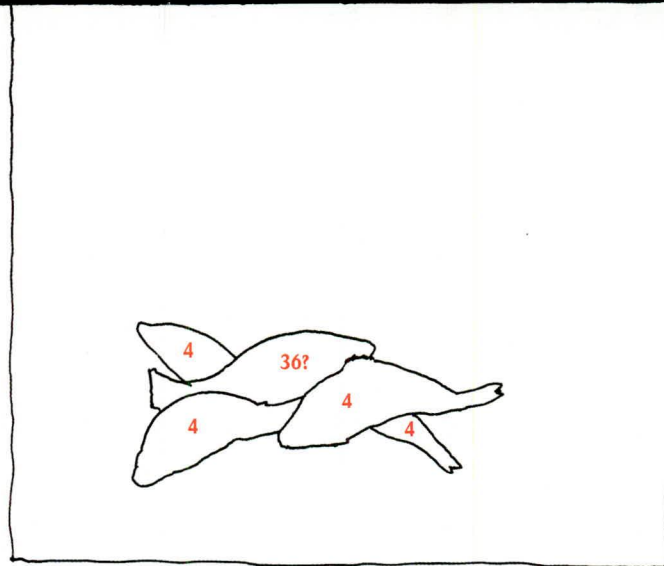


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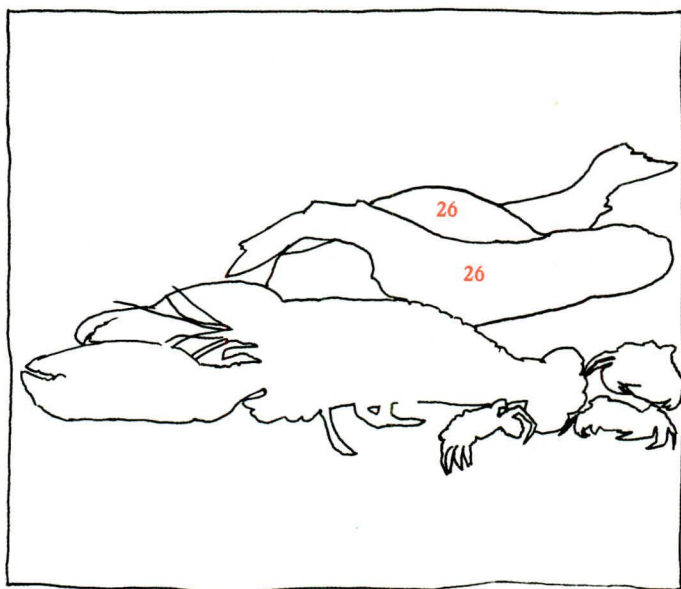




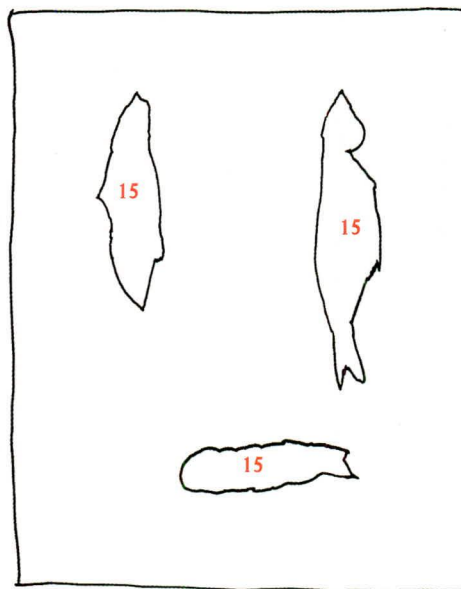
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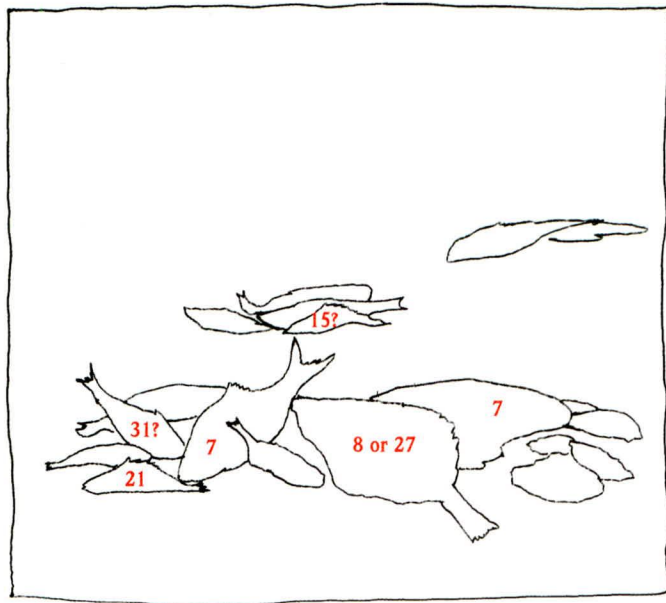
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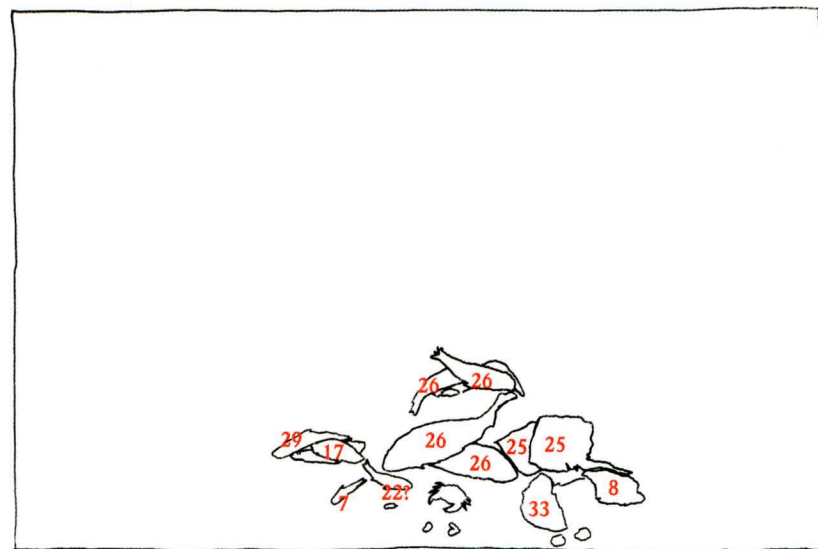
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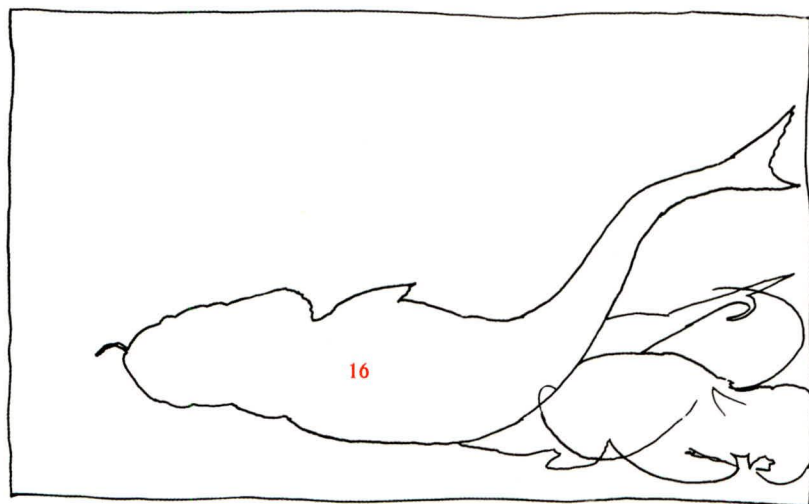
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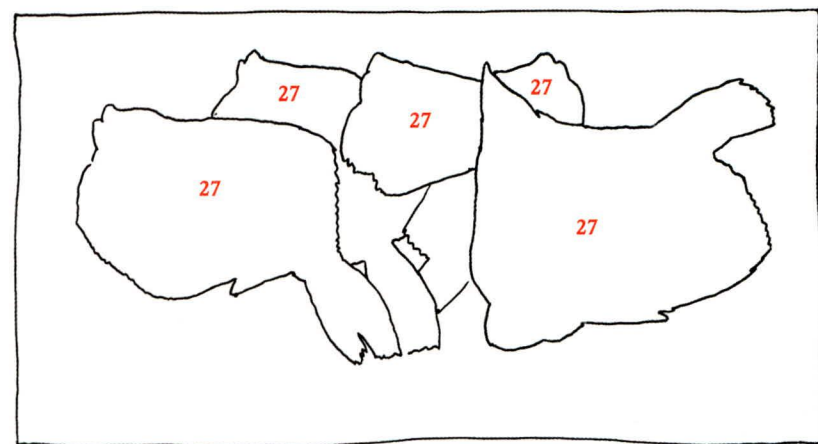
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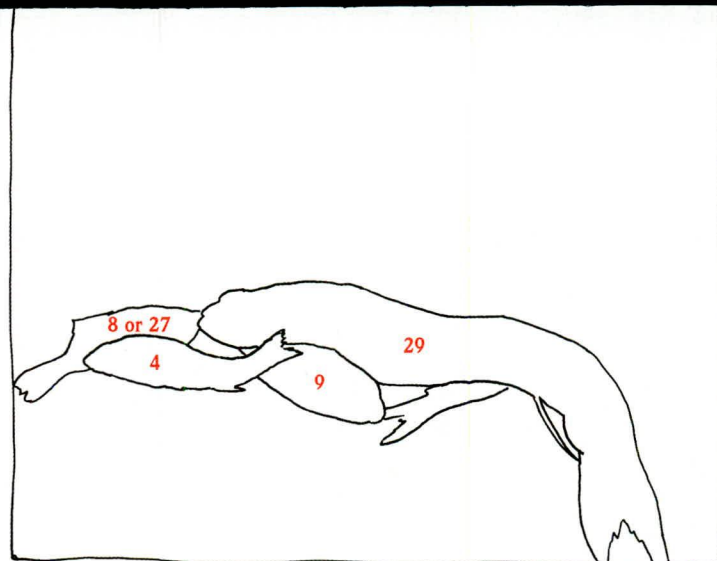
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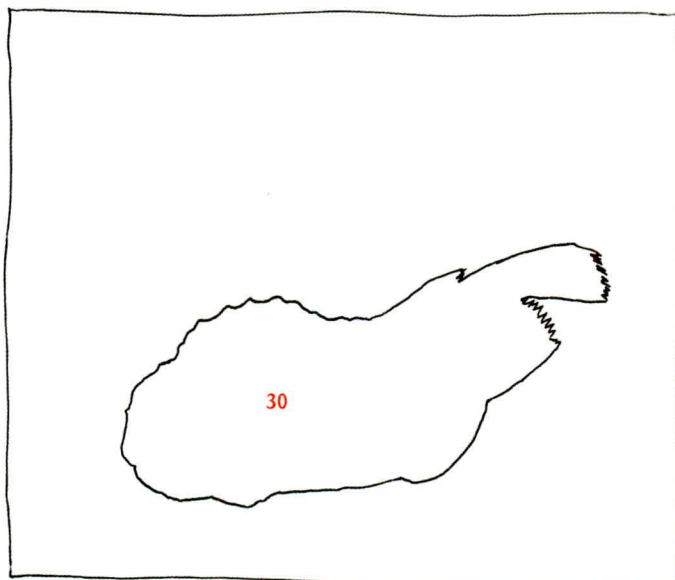
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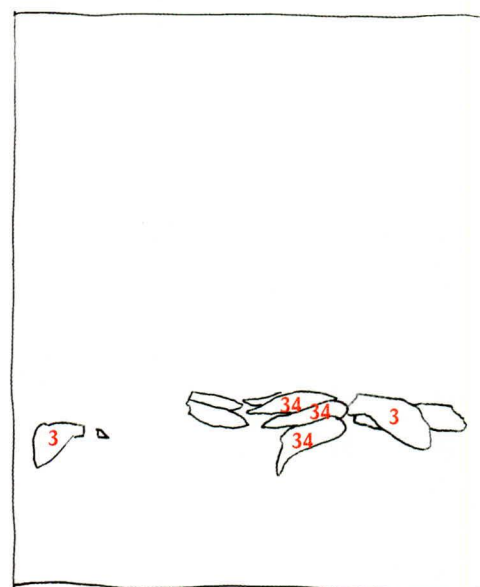
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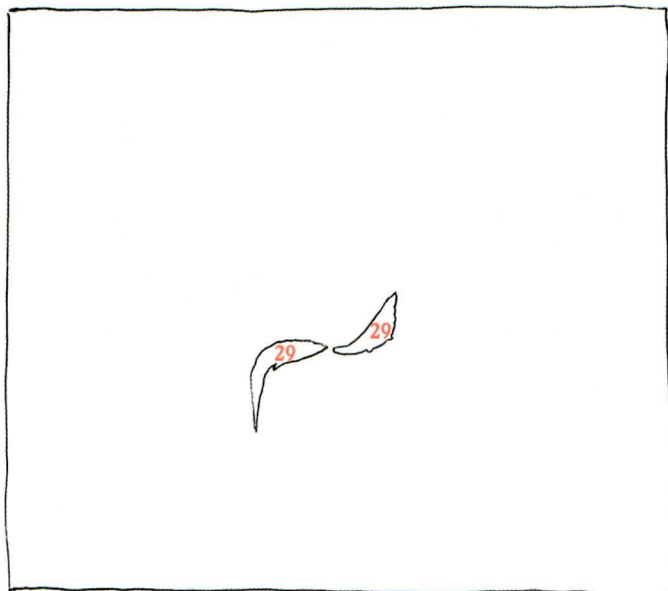
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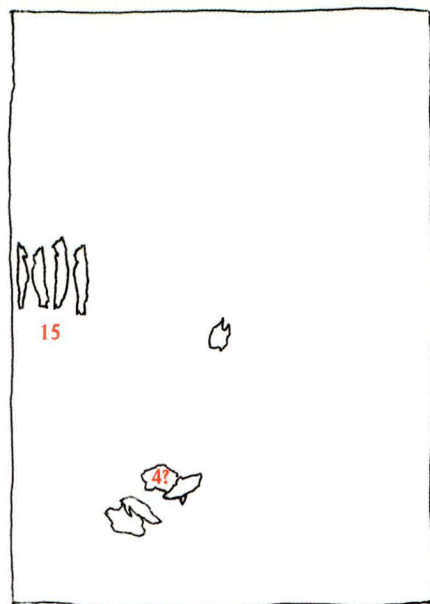
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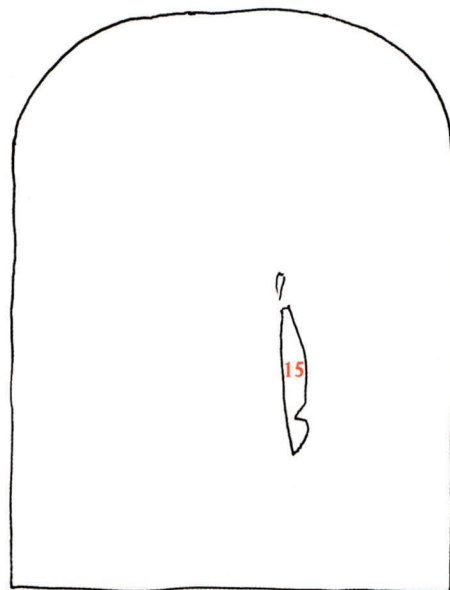
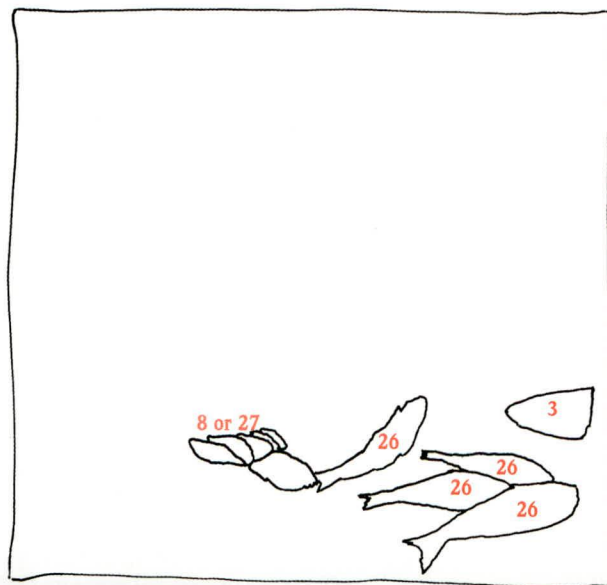
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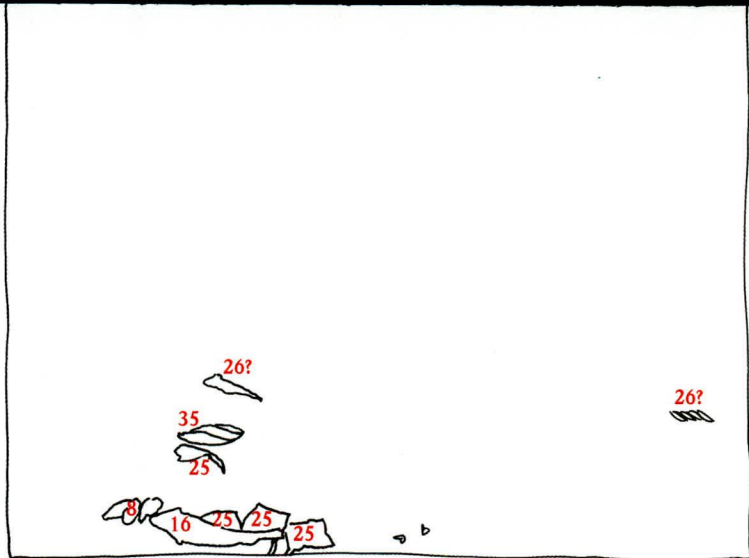


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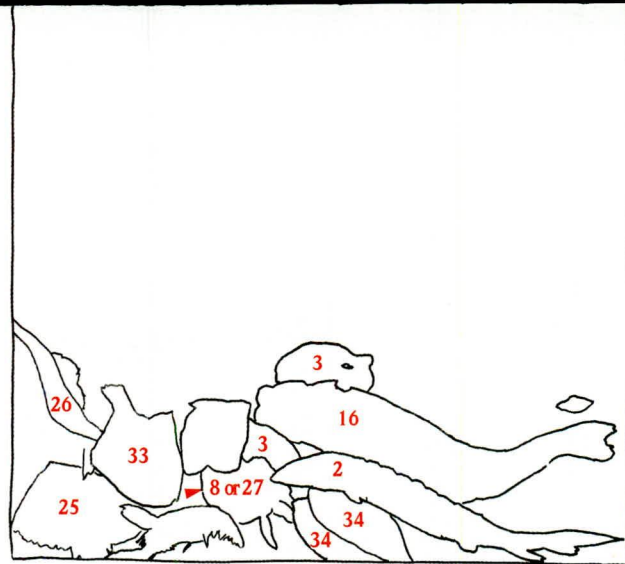


cat. no. 57





cat. no. 60



cat. no. 61

**COMPENDIUM OF
FISH STILL-LIFE PAINTERS**

Fred G. Meijer

This compendium of fish still-life painters is a condensed version of A. van der Willigen and F.G. Meijer's *A Dictionary of Dutch and Flemish Still-life Painters Working in Oils 1525-1725* (Primavera Pers, Leiden 2003), with additions and improvements. Only painters of pure fish still lifes have been included here; the makers of other types of still life with (a) fish, such as Willem van Aelst, Willem Claesz. Heda and Jan Davidsz. de Heem are not discussed. Lists of paintings, as are included in the above-mentioned *Dictionary*, have been omitted.

The painters' dates of birth and death are given as accurately as possible; a b indicates a date of baptism or burial. The names of months exceeding five letters have been abbreviated. Only when the place of birth and/or death is known with certainty is it given before and after the date in question. Supposed places of birth and death are given in the text of the entry. The spelling of the artists' names follows that found in the authoritative database *RKDartist* of the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD), The Hague (which can be consulted at www.rkd.nl).

A brief biography and an indication of the scope of the painter's oeuvre are given in the text itself.

Alexander **Adriaenssen** Antwerp 17 Jan. 1587b - 30 Oct. 1661b Antwerp
Adriaenssen was a pupil of Artus van Laeck in 1597 and became a master in 1610. He specialised in still lifes, with fish as his main subject, dated examples of which range from 1631 to 1661. He also produced still lifes of game, flowers and fruit. Monograph with catalogue raisonné Spiessens 1990.

Cat. no. 8; fig. 7, p. 24

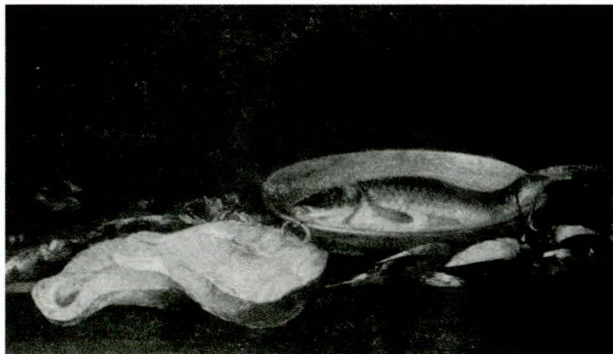
Pieter **Aertsen** (also known as Lange Pier) Amsterdam c. 1508 - 3 June 1575b Amsterdam
Aertsen was a pupil of Allaert Claesz. Around 1526, he left Amsterdam, possibly travelling as far as Italy. He joined the Antwerp guild in 1535. Although he painted religious subjects, he came to favour images of daily life. In 1556, Aertsen returned to Amsterdam where he spent the rest of his life. Aertsen was not a prolific painter of fish, but the *Fish market* in the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Cologne ranks among the earliest Netherlandish works in which fish occupy a prominent place.

Fig. 1, p. 19

F... de **Backer** active c. third quarter seventeenth century

De Backer is an unrecorded painter, probably Flemish, whose signature was found on a fish still life in the manner of Alexander Adriaenssen.

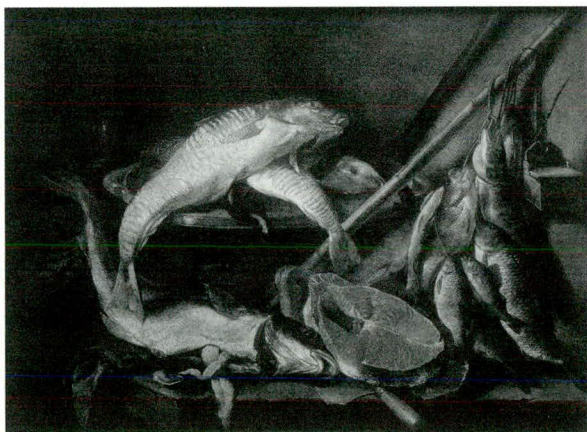
F. de Backer,
Fish still life with a cat.
Oil on panel, 40 x 68 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague



Gerrit **Battem** Rotterdam ca. 1636 - 24 okt 1684b Rotterdam

The artist is traceable in Rotterdam from 1664 until his death, although he was reported as living in Utrecht around 1668. Known mainly as a painter of landscapes, he also produced a number of still lifes, kitchen pieces and genre scenes, in which fish occasionally play a prominent role.

Fig. 50, p. 65



Gerrit Battem,
Fish still life.
Oil on canvas, 89.3 x 116.5 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

Abraham Hendricksz. van **Beijeren** The Hague 1620/21 - March 1690 Overschie
He was a pupil of Tyman Cracht in 1636 and is recorded in Leiden in 1638-1639, where he married a girl from The Hague in 1639. He became a master in The Hague in 1640. Still in The Hague, Van Beijeren lost his wife and remarried in 1647 (Anna van den Queborn, a niece of Pieter de Putter). He worked in Delft from 1657 to 1663, again in The Hague from 1663 to 1669, in Amsterdam from 1669 to 1674, in Alkmaar in 1674, in Gouda in 1675 and in Overschie (near Rotterdam) from 1677 until his death. A sizeable votive tablet in the church at Maassluis of 1649 includes a number of panels by the master. In addition to fish still lifes, he painted floral bouquets and a great variety of fruit and sumptuous still lifes, as well as sea- and riverscapes.

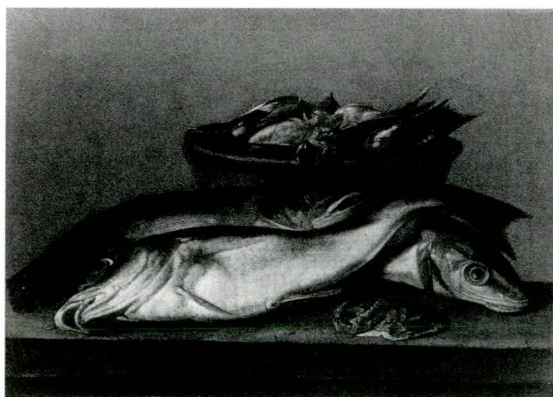
Cat. nos. 19-22; fig. 23, p. 40; fig. 13, p. 89

Peeter van den **Bemden** Antwerp active c. 1650–1652

Though his identity is not secure, he was most likely a member of the Antwerp Van den Bemden family of artists, and probably the Peeter van den Bemden who was registered by the guild as an 'amateur' (*liefhebber*) in 1641, as well as the painter Van den Bemden (without a first name) who paid his master's fee in 1649-1650 and whose death dues were paid in 1653-1654. His still lifes (no other subjects by him are known) include kitchen still lifes, usually with some fish, and at least one large and one smaller still life of fish. Fig. 10, p. 27

Peeter van den Bemden,
Fish still life.

Oil on canvas on panel, 41.5 x 55.5 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

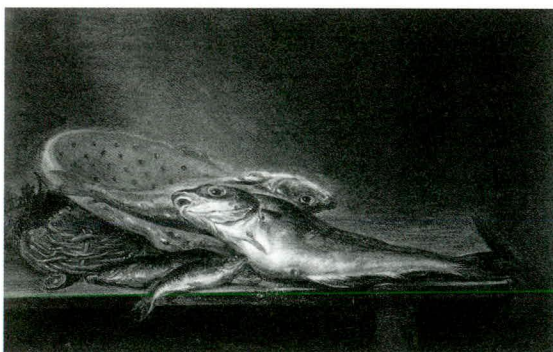


V... Bergh active c. 1659-1682

The signature was found on a fish still life that was on the Dutch art market around 1977, and on two drawings in Besançon with dates that are read as 1659 and 1682. All three works appear to copy compositions by Pieter van Schaevenborgh. Identification with the Alkmaar painters Jan van den Bergh (1587/88-after 1650) or Matthijs van den Bergh (1615-1687) is unlikely.

V... Bergh,
Fish still life.

Oil on panel, 20 x 29.5 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague



Joachim **Beuckelaer** Antwerp c. 1533 - 1575 Antwerp

Trained by his uncle Pieter Aertsen, he became a master of the Antwerp guild in 1560 and worked there until his death. He painted market scenes, including fish markets, as well as religious subjects and genre scenes, which are often set outdoors. An exhibition was devoted to his work in Ghent (1986).

Cat. no. 1; fig. 39, p. 110

Peeter (II) **Boel** Antwerp 22 Oct. 1622b - 3 Sep. 1674 Paris

Boel was first taught by his father, an engraver, and then by Joannes Fijt. He travelled to Italy and joined the Antwerp guild after his return in 1650. He left for Paris around 1669 and died there. He was a prolific painter of scenes with living animals and game still lifes, and also produced a small number of fish still lifes.

Cat. nos. 11-13

Jan de **Bont** active 1641 - 2 May 1653b Utrecht

Born in Schoonhoven, De Bont worked in Utrecht where his name appears in written sources from 1641 until his death in 1653. Although he painted genre scenes and banquet still lifes, fish still lifes appear to have been his favourite subject.

Cat. nos. 28-30

Jan **Boogaert** c. 1639 - 20 March 1692b The Hague

Boogaert recorded as a painter in The Hague in 1657 at the age of about 18. He joined the guild there in 1660 or one of the following years, and was still referred to as a painter at the time of his burial. He is sometimes confused with Iemant Boogaert, who worked in Middelburg from around 1644 until his death in 1656, except for a brief stay in The Hague from 1647 to 1649. Two still lifes signed 'J. Boogaert', one of fish in the Middelburg Town Hall in a typical Hague style, and another of flowers and a dead bird, must be the work of this Jan Boogaert.

Fig. 27, p. 44

Laurens **Borsman** active before 1673

Borsman is documented as the painter of a fish still life and a portrait in the inventory drawn up in The Hague after his widow's death in 1673. He was probably an amateur.

Peter van **Boucle** Paris active c. 1625-1673

Peter (or Pierre) van Boucle is first recorded in Paris in 1623. He claimed to have been a pupil of Frans Snijders. Although no proof of this has been found in Antwerp, he may well have worked for a while in the master's immediate vicinity (before 1623?). He was presumably taught to draw by his father and to paint in one of the many workshops in Antwerp. His work was widely acclaimed in Paris, where he lived until his death. Still lifes of fruit, vegetables, and game, often enlivened with dogs and other animals, were his main subject, but he also painted a number of fish still lifes.



Peter van Boucle,
The carp and the pike, 1652.
Oil on canvas, 80 x 101 cm.
Houston, Museum of Fine Arts

Michel **Bouillon** active 1638 - in or after 1674

Born in Ere (near Tournai), Bouillon joined the Tournai guild in 1638 and was still working there in 1670. While known mainly as a painter of kitchen and market still lifes, fruit and flowers, a few fish still lifes can be ascribed to him.

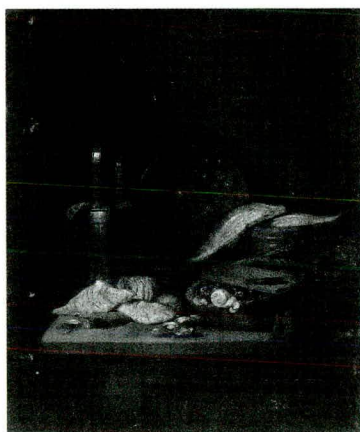


Michel Bouillon,
Still life with fish.
Oil on canvas, 151 x 116 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

Quiringh Gerritsz. van **Brekelenkam** 1622/25 - in or after 1669

Probably born in Zwammerdam (near Leiden), he is first recorded in 1648 in Leiden when he was admitted to the newly established guild. Mentions of him are found there up to the autumn of 1667, and there are also works dated 1669. Known mainly as a painter of scenes of daily life, he also produced three still lifes in which fish play an important role. Catalogue raisonné in Lasius 1992.

Cat. no. 55

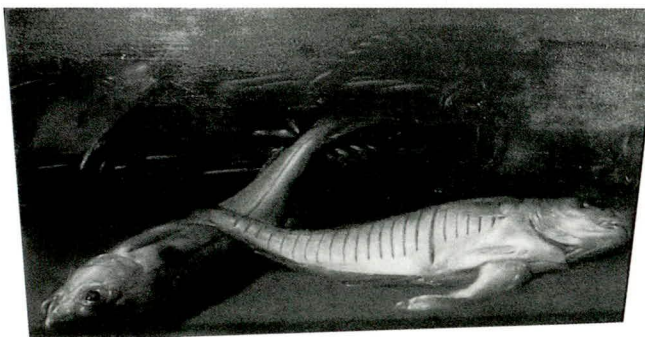


Quiringh van Brekelenkam,
Still life with fish, 1660.
Oil on panel, 38 x 31 cm.
Berlin, Staatliche Museen,
Gemäldegalerie © Staatliche Museen
zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie

Pieter Anthonisz. **Bronchorst** Delft 16 May 1588 - 21 June 1661 Delft

The signature on a fish still life on the German art market in 2001 was read as 'P. van Bronchorst', which would indicate that Pieter was not only painting architectural scenes with historical staffage, but still lifes as well. It is impossible to establish whether other still lifes by Bronchorst (without a first name) recorded in Delft inventories of 1641 and 1658 were by him or his son Claes Bronchorst (1611-in or after 1652).

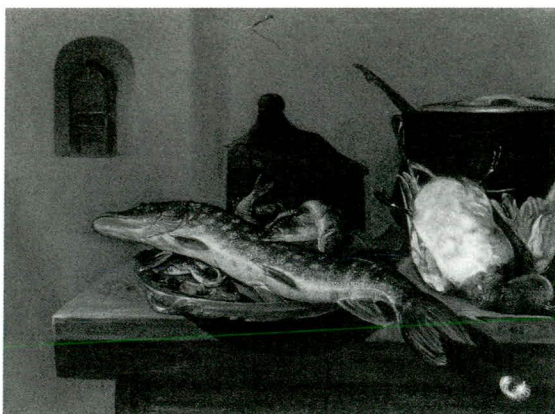
Pieter Bronchorst
(attributed to),
Fish still life.
Oil on panel, 30 x 50 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague



J... **Brouwer** active c. 1675 or c. 1700

Some uncertainty exists as to exactly who painted a few still lifes bearing a signature by J. Brouwer, particularly one of a still life of fish and a dead duck. A certain Justus Brouwer was active in Leiden around 1675 and a Jan Brouwer was in The Hague around 1700; the latter was a Delft-born painter of portraits and ornaments. To date, old mentions have yielded no clarity. However, since the two known works appear to have been influenced by Pieter van Noort and a dating to the 1670s seems appropriate, the Leiden painter Justus Brouwer is the most likely candidate.

J. Brouwer,
Still life with fish and a dead duck.
Oil on canvas, 74 x 95 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague



Philips **Brueghel** Antwerp 24 Dec. 1635b - in or after 1662

This artist was probably taught by his father Jan (II) Brueghel, and was registered as a master in Antwerp in 1655. He was working in Paris around 1658-1661 and is documented in Antwerp again in 1662. His large canvas of a still life of fish, vegetables and fruit betrays an original mind evidencing a greater affinity with Van Boucle and others in Paris than his still-life painting brothers.



Philips Brueghel,
Still life with fish.
Oil on canvas, 88 x 115 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

R(ochus?) van **Burgh** active second half seventeenth century

The signature 'R VBurgh' (VB in ligature) is found on a fish still life with a vista of a beach now in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, which is reminiscent of the work of Isaac van Duynen. Two signed fish still lifes by the same hand are in Bergues and others are mentioned in sales catalogues of 1764 (as by 'R.D.Burg') and 1933. Another painting, distinctly signed 'R... burgh Fe', surfaced in a Sotheby's sale in 2001 (as by a follower of Van Beijeren). The earliest mention of a fish still life by this painter appears in a 1687 Leiden inventory. It was included as Verburgh alongside nine landscapes and one portrait by Verburgh, among others. These paintings were previously assumed to be by the Rotterdam painter Dionys Verburgh (c. 1650-1722). However, this must be incorrect, for the same landscapes had already featured in a 1667 Leiden inventory. Hendrick Rochusz. van der Burgh (1627-in or after 1666) worked in Leiden, and his genre scenes have often been upgraded with attributions to Pieter de Hooch. Hendrick's son, Rochus,

was born in Leiden and was last recorded as a painter in The Hague in 1688. All of the evidence would seem to indicate that the fish still life by 'Verburgh' in the 1687 inventory and the other still lifes by 'R VBurgh' were the work of Hendrick van der Burgh's son Rochus.

Rochus van Burgh,
Fish still life.
Oil on canvas, 62 x 52.5 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

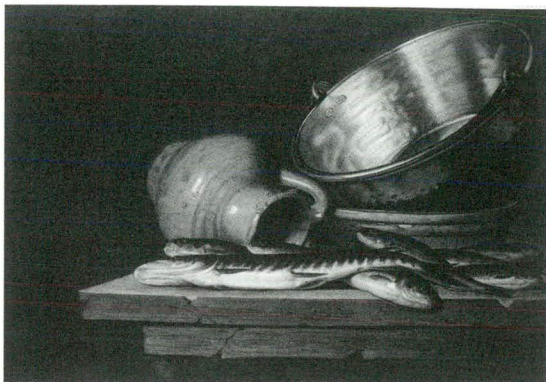


Abraham van **Calraet** Dordrecht 7 Oct. 1642 - 11 June 1722 Dordrecht

Calraet was originally trained as a woodcarver and took drawing lessons from the sculptors Huppe. He only began painting later, probably influenced by the lessons his younger brother Barent received from Aelbert Cuyp. Initially he painted still lifes, while later he concentrated primarily on landscapes. The majority of his still lifes are of fruit, and a single floral bouquet is known. Only one fish still life seems to fit securely into Calraet's oeuvre. Cat. no. 46

J... **Camp** active 1660 - in or after 1662

Signatures 'J. Camp' are found on a fish still life (dated 1660), a portrait (of 1662), and a portrait drawing. Although the artist has been identified as Jan Camp, a pupil of Paulus Moreelse in Utrecht in 1611, the 50 years between this pupillage and the dated works argue against this identification.



J. Camp,
Still life with fish, 1660.
Oil on panel, 65 x 47 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

Nicolaes **Cave** Antwerp active 1619-1651

Cave was a member of the Antwerp guild in 1619, and was last recorded there in 1651, when his death dues were paid. He signed a still life of dead fowl and a live falcon in the style of Clara Peeters. Several fish still lifes similarly indebted to Peeters can also be attributed to him.



Nicolaes Cave
(attributed to),
Fish still life with a cat.
Oil on panel, 34 x 55 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

Pieter **Claesz** c. 1597 - 1 Jan. 1661b [i.e. died Dec. 1660] Haarlem

Originary from Flanders, Claesz is first mentioned at his son's baptism in Haarlem in 1620. He is known only as a painter of still lifes, almost consistently monogrammed 'PC', sometimes extended to 'PCH' (H for Haarlem). He dated the majority of his works, in the period from 1621 to 1660. Except for some *vanitas* still lifes, most of his works are 'breakfast' still lifes. While many of these include a plate with a herring or fried fish, they cannot be called fish still lifes proper, although Houbraken did consider fish still lifes

as his prime subject. Late in his career, however, the artist did paint several pure fish still lifes, often including a cat.

Cat. no. 48; fig. 46, p. 61

Gerrit Arentsz. van **Deurs** active 1658 - in or after 1664

He joined the Haarlem guild on 2 April 1658. Some allegorical genre scenes by the artist are known, and a game still life was in a Rotterdam auction on 6 August 1782. A still life with a large fish, distinctly signed 'G.V. Deurs', was in a private collection in Warsaw.

Gerrit van Deurs,
Still life with fish.
Oil on canvas, 81 x 67.5 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague



Jacob **Deyman** active 1643

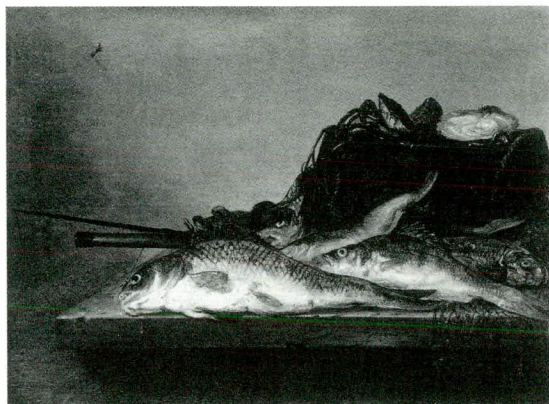
Deyman was recorded as a pupil of Salomon de Bray in Haarlem in 1643. He is presumed to be the maker of a fish piece by 'Deymans' in an auction in Antwerp, 28 September 1765.

Jan **Dirven** Antwerp active 1632-1653

A pupil of Rombout Meesens in Antwerp in 1632, Dirven probably spent the majority of his active years somewhere else. His death dues, however, were paid to the Antwerp guild, implying that he was working there again towards the end of his life. Curiously, his choice of subject matter reveal a marked affinity with works by Pieter de Putter and other artists active in

The Hague in the 1640s. Yet, no record of Dirven has been found there. Dated works are known from 1643 to 1649.

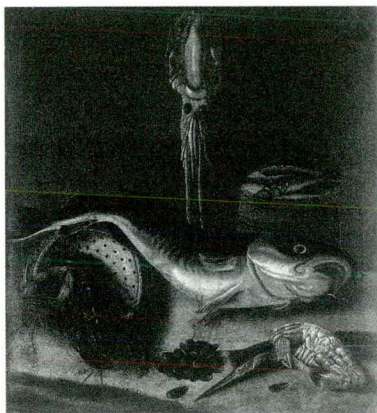
Fig. 24, p. 41



Jan Dirven,
Fish still life, 1648.
Oil on panel, 38 x 52 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

A. van **Doeff** active second half seventeenth century

The signature 'AVDoeff' (AVD in monogram), with flourishes, is found on a fish still life in the Enkhuizen Museum, on loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Nothing about the artist's life is known. He was probably an amateur from the Northern Netherlands, possibly influenced by I. van Duijnen.



A. van Doeff,
Fish still life.
Oil on canvas, 104 x 92.5 cm.
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.
© Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

Isaac Gerritsz. van **Duijnen**

Dordrecht April 1628 - between Dec. 1679 and Feb. 1681 The Hague

Van Duijnen was chiefly active in The Hague, where he is first recorded in 1657 and where he probably spent the rest of his life. From a notarised deed of 1661 it is known that he travelled to Rome sometime between 1651 and 1657. In addition to his main subject matter, fish still lifes, Van Duijnen painted still lifes of fruit and vegetables, which should probably be situated early in his career (two of them are dated 1651).

Cat. nos. 23 and 24; fig. 26, p. 42

Jacob Foppens van **Es** active 1617 - 11 March 1666b Antwerp

He is first recorded in 1617, when he became a master in the Antwerp guild, without prior registration as an apprentice. Throughout his successful career in Antwerp he was often referred to as Fopsen (Foppens, etc.). He painted still lifes only, usually signing his full name in capital letters. While fish occur in some of his many banquets, pure fish scenes are rare.

Cat. no. 7

Johannes Pietersz. **Fabritius** Midden Beemster 30 Nov. 1636b - in or after 1693 Hoorn

He probably studied with his father, an amateur painter. Unlike his two older brothers, he does not appear to have ventured outside of North Holland. He worked in Hoorn and was last recorded there in 1693. He painted a pair of impressive still lifes of salt- and freshwater fish and some still lifes of game, flowers and fruit.

Figs. 44 and 45, p. 60

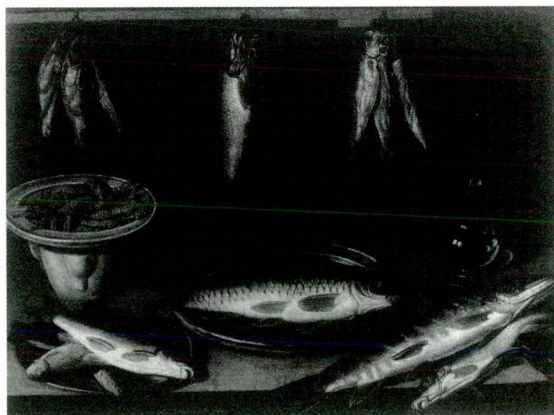
Joannes **Fijt** Antwerp 15 March 1611b - 11 Sep. 1661 Antwerp

Fijt was a pupil of Hans van den Berghe in Antwerp in 1622 and subsequently of Frans Snijders. He travelled to southern Europe after his acceptance as a master in 1630 and was back in Antwerp by 1641. He painted mainly game still lifes and living animals as well as a few important fish pieces.

Cat. no. 10; fig. 11, p. 28

Abraham **Gibbens** active 1629 - in or after 1635

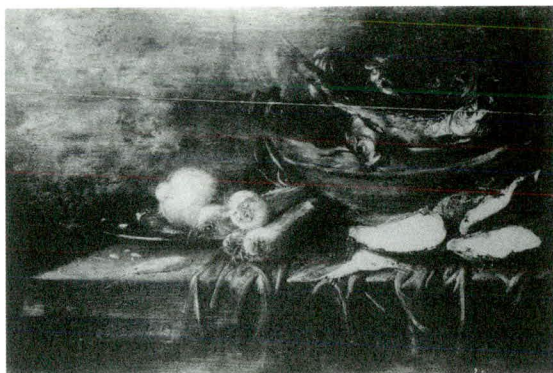
Gibbens is known from three signed still lifes, all dated 1635, one of which is of fish. Although usually called Abiah in the literature, the painter is no doubt identical to Abraham Gibbens who was accepted in 1629 as a master painter in the corporation of Saint Germain-des-Prés, where Flemish artists congregated during their years in Paris.



Abraham Gibbens,
Fish still life, 1635.
Oil on canvas, 91 x 114 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

Philips **Gijssels** active c. 1650 - in or after 1663?

A painter by the name of Philips Gijssels joined the guild in The Hague in 1650. He was probably from out of town. He may be identical with the painter Philips Geysels recorded in Breda in 1653-1654 and 1663. He is probably the maker of still lifes bearing a Gijssels signature, including fish scenes, which differ significantly in style and handling from the work of the Antwerp painter Peeter Gijssels (1621-1690).



Philips Gijssels,
Still life with smoked herring, 1649?.
Oil on panel, 39.5 x 55 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

Jacob **Gillig** Utrecht c. 1636 - 24 July 1701 Utrecht

Originally active as a tradesman, he later became the warden of the jail in Utrecht's Town Hall. He married a woman from the Willaerts family in 1661 and may have received instruction from Willem Ormea. Though he lived in Utrecht throughout his life, he never joined the guild. Before 1665, Gillig called himself Gulek and signed 'JA Gúlek'. His early work appears to have been inspired by Ormea. Later, freshwater fish constituted his primary subject matter. He also painted several portraits.

Cat. nos. 33-36; fig. 36, p. 51

Dirck **Govertsz** called Van Hedel (later: Van Heel)

Gorinchem c. 1580 - between 1644 and 1654

Govertsz painted portraits, animals and (kitchen) still lifes, some with striking depictions of fish. His work had remained unrecognised until recently, and his monogram 'DG' was often mistaken for that of Jacob de Gheijn.

Fig. 20, p. 36

Dirck Govertsz,
Fish still life with a cat.
Oil on canvas, 110 x 180 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague



Jacobus Jorisz. van der **Hagen** The Hague 30 Dec. 1657b - c. 3 Jan. 1715 The Hague
He was the son of the well-known landscape painter, who died when Jacob was 11. From early documents (1674 and 1680) it is known that he was trained as a tailor. He probably received his artistic education from his brother Cornelis. He painted a small number of game still lifes and a fish piece (a late work from 17[0]7).



Jacobus van der Hagen,
Fish still life, 1707.
Oil on canvas, 63.5 x 86.5 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

M.. **Hagius** active 1657-1663

The signature and date 'Menso (?) Hagius fe A° 1662' are found on a fish still life in a private collection. A portrait from 1657 and a game still life dated 1663 were auctioned under the same last name and initial, the still life in Groningen in 1863. There are no other traces of the artist.

Cat. no. 53

Antonie van **Isendoorn** c. 1625 - after 2 March 1676?

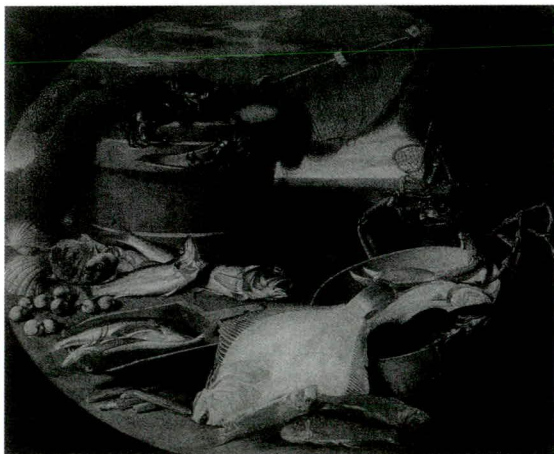
He was recorded by the Amsterdam physician Sysmus around 1675 as a painter of portraits and fish in Delft, whose work Sysmus qualified as 'beautiful' and whose age he gave as 45 in 1670. A painter of that name – not from Delft – was indeed admitted to the Delft guild in 1669. He is also mentioned as winning a lottery of paintings held at Wijk-bij-Duurstede in 1649, as a son or nephew of Johan van Isendoorn, burgomaster and painter, from which it would appear that Antonie had a Utrecht background. He is probably identical to Anthonie van Isendoorn who had a testament drawn up on 2 March 1676 together with his brother Andries.

Jacques van de **Kerckhove** 1636/37 - c. 1712

The artist was probably born in Antwerp, where he was recorded as a pupil of Joannes Fijt in 1649. He must have moved to Italy soon thereafter, and is mentioned in Venice as of 1663. He subsequently worked for many years in Vicenza and is thought to have died in Venice. In Italy he was often referred

to as Giacomo Semiterio or Giacomo da Castello. Primarily a painter of live animals and game still lifes, he also depicted fish in an Italo-Flemish style. Catalogue raisonné in Greindl 1983.

Jacques van de Kerckhove,
Fish still life.
Oil on canvas, 97 x 116.5 cm (oval).
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague



Frans **Kerkhoff** Groningen active 1661

Kerkhoff is known for some still lifes of game and of fish, which are strongly indebted to the work of various other painters such as Jan Vonck and Pieter van Noort. One wonders, thus, whether Kerkhoff was a mere copyist whose work cannot be identified without a signature.

Frans Kerkhoff,
Fish still life with dead birds.
Oil on canvas, 102 x 152 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague



Jan (I) van **Kessel** Antwerp 5 April 1626b - 17 April 1679 Antwerp

He probably received his initial instruction from his father, portraitist Hieronymus van Kessel. When he was accepted as a master in the Antwerp guild around 1645, he was called a flower painter. From the journals of his uncle Jan (II) Brueghel, who was probably his teacher, we know that in 1646 the latter sold two copies by Jan van Kessel of one of his own flower garlands. Van Kessel's subject matter soon expanded, and his oeuvre includes a great variety of still lifes, both in and out of doors. For a review and catalogue of Van Kessel's fish scenes, see Giepmans 2001.

Cat. nos. 14 and 15; fig. 15, p. 31; fig. 16, p. 32

Johannes (I) **Kuveenis** Bremen c. 1620 - well after 1666

Kuveenis married in The Hague in 1649 and joined the guild there in 1650. The substantial number of works by him that were auctioned in The Hague in 1647 as well as the style of a 1645 game still life suggest that he settled there early on. The last mention of him in The Hague dates from 1659, and he is subsequently recorded in Amsterdam in 1665-1666. The style of a late game piece indicates that he was still active in the 1670s. He signed as 'J. Kuveenis', with the J often written through an O to form the monogram JO (for *Johannes?*). He painted still lifes of game, fruit and fish. One of the fish still lifes is dated 1647.

Fig. 22, p. 38

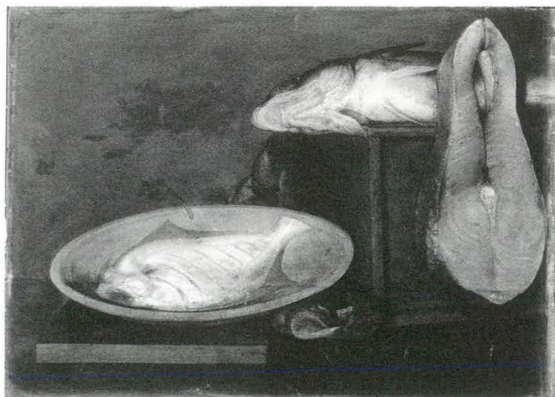


Johannes (I) Kuveenis,
Still life with fish, 1647.
Oil on panel, 57.5 x 68.5 cm.
Private collection.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

Pieter **Legouch** Lokeren active before 1649 - 22 Nov. 1664b Middelburg

Legouch was a pupil of Nicolaes Lamourlet in Antwerp in 1632. He is most probably the painter Pieter Legoes, who worked in Delft in 1648 and who joined the guild in Middelburg in 1651 as an artist-painter. His only known works are a fish still life, signed and dated 'P.Legouch 16[5?]7', and a *vanitas* still life.

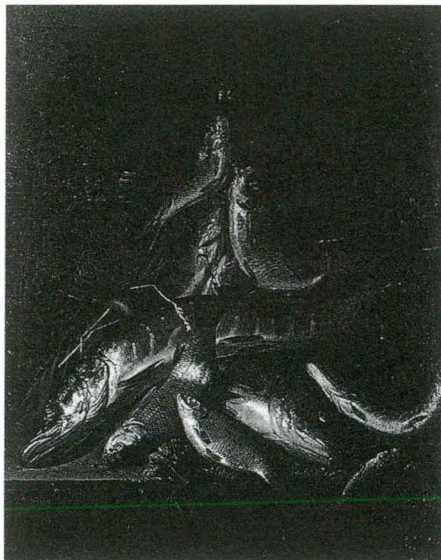
Pieter Legouch,
Fish still life, 1657.
Oil on panel, 47 x 61.8 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague



... **Lochon** active after c. 1665

A signature is found on a fish still life in a French private collection that appears to be a copy of a painting by Jacob Gillig, and which therefore must be dated after around 1665.

... Lochon,
Fish still life.
Oil on canvas, 62.5 x 49 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague



Carstian **Luyckx** Antwerp 17 Aug. 1623b - well after 1658

Luyckx was a pupil of Philips de Marlier in 1640, and active in the workshop of Frans (III) Francken in 1642, joining the guild as a master in 1645. He is recorded in Antwerp up to 1653, but was most likely active there until the late 1650s. Although not confirmed by archival material, he probably subsequently worked in France. He is known for a wide variety of (still life) subjects. A few fish still lifes – which appeared on the art market under different names – may be considered as being late works by Luyckx.



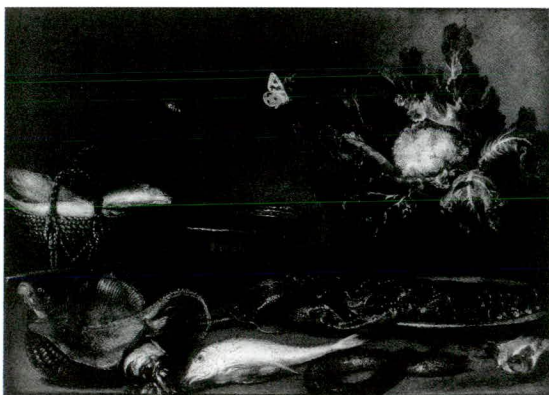
Carstian Luyckx,
Fish still life with cats.
Oil on canvas, 111 x 144 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

Otto **Marseus van Schrieck** (also known as Snuffelaer)

1619/20 - 22 June 1678b Amsterdam

The artist was born in or near Nijmegen. His date of birth is generally given as above, but at the time of his marriage in 1664, the artist stated that he was forty years old. He probably received his training in Amsterdam; his earliest known bouquet dates from 1644. In 1648 he embarked on a long journey to Rome and Florence, among other cities, returning around 1657. He then settled near Amsterdam in Diemen, where he painted mainly woodland still lifes with reptiles and other creatures. One single small fish still life by Marseus is known, which he painted during his Italian sojourn very much under the influence of local fish still-life painters. It is signed and dated 16[5]4, and not 1653, as is sometimes stated.

Otto Marseus van Schrieck,
Fish still life, 1654.
 Oil on tin, 14.6 x 19.5 cm.
 Private collection.
 Photo: RKD, The Hague



Pieter van **Mase** active second half seventeenth century - after Aug. 1703

The signature 'PV: [PV in monogram] maes f.' is found on a fish still life in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. A large game still life with fish in a corner by the same hand (private collection) is signed 'PV: [PV in monogram] mase'. The artist must be Pieter van Mase, known to have been active in Rotterdam as a painter of landscapes and genre scenes. He is also called Pieter van Maes or Maasius, and worked as an art dealer as well, in which capacity he is last recorded for valuing a Hague estate in August 1703.

Fig. 51, p. 65

Pieter van Mase,
Fish still life.
 Oil on panel, 71.1 x 99.1 cm.
 Los Angeles, Los Angeles County
 Museum of Art



Abraham **Mignon** Frankfurt 21 June 1640b - 27 March 1679b Utrecht

Mignon moved to Wetzlar with his parents in 1649, but the next year he was entrusted to Jacob Marrel in Frankfurt, from whom he presumably

received his training. During one of his visits to Utrecht, probably in 1664, Marrel left his pupil with Jan Dz. de Heem, who in the meantime had settled in Utrecht (Houbraken states that Mignon stayed with Marrel for 'two times seven years', until he was 24). In 1669 Mignon joined the guild in Utrecht, where he worked until his death. None of his works are dated. In addition to his many still lifes of flowers and fruit, as well as several woodlands which include some fish, one fish still life by Mignon is known, based on a composition by Jacob Gillig. Monograph Kraemer-Noble 1973.

Fig. 37, p. 53

Pieter de **Molijn** London 6 April 1595b - 23 March 1661b Haarlem

Molijn joined the Haarlem guild in 1616 and is now known only as a landscape painter. A kitchen scene by Molijn is mentioned in a 1661 Haarlem inventory and a fish still life (together with a landscape by Molijn) is found in a 1673 Hague inventory. This suggests that, in spite of the omission of the first name, Pieter de Molijn did indeed produce such paintings.

Frans van Cuyck de **Myerhop** Bruges c. 1640 - Oct. 1689 Ghent

He was a member of a noble family that had emigrated from Holland. He considered himself a gentleman-amateur, even though he was dean of the Ghent guild from 1679 to 1685. He was also dean of several commercial guilds in Ghent, where he lived as of 1663. He signed in various ways, mostly writing the second half of the double-barrelled family name in full. Though he painted different types of still lifes and at least one group portrait, fish appear to have been among his favourite subjects.



Frans van Cuyck de Myerhop,
Fish still life.
Oil on canvas, 76 x 62 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

Jacob van **Nieulandt** Amsterdam 1592/93 - 27 Dec. 1634b Amsterdam

Jacob was the younger brother of the better-known and versatile painter Adriaen (I) van Nieulandt. Presently, he is known solely from two market scenes, of which the one dated 1617 in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, depicts a fish stall.

Fig. 18, p. 34

Pieter Derckz. (II) van **Noort** active before 1649 - 4 Sep. 1672b Zwolle

He was mostly likely born in Leiden, where his parents married in 1621, and his father was buried in 1624. In contrast to what was earlier assumed, he was not the son of Pieter (I) van Noort (c. 1592-after 1634), a Leiden painter of biblical subjects. Pieter (II) joined the Leiden guild when it was founded in March 1648, but left town soon thereafter. He had settled in Zwolle by 1652. Fish still lifes by Pieter van Noort are listed in seventeenth-century inventories (for example in Amsterdam in 1663). The date on a painting of a fisherman in Warsaw was read as 1631, but is more likely 1661 given the date of 1664 on a variant of this composition. In addition to still lifes of game and fish, he also painted some genre scenes and portraits. Cat. nos. 51 and 52; fig. 55, p. 69

Hendrick ten **Oever** Zwolle 11 April 1639b - 15 June 1716b Zwolle

Ten Oever received his initial training in Zwolle, but moved to Amsterdam in 1659 to study under his cousin Cornelis de Bie. He was back in Zwolle by 1665 and remained there until his death. Known chiefly for his landscapes, he also painted portraits and mythological subjects. Among his few still lifes is one fish piece. An exhibition of his work was held in Zwolle in 1957. Cat. no. 54

Marcus **Ormea** active before 1611 - 11 April 1636b Utrecht

He is first recorded in 1611 as a member of the Utrecht guild. One of the many victims of the plague that struck Utrecht in the spring of 1636, he was buried together with several members of his family. While he was undoubtedly a prominent local painter, the only solid evidence of his output is the fact that he donated a still life of fish on a beach to a local hospital in 1628. No secure works by him are known (however, see cat. no. 26).

Willem **Ormea** active 1634 - 4 July 1673 Utrecht

Probably born in Utrecht, he studied with his father Marcus Ormea. Works by the artist are dated from 1634 to 1658, but he was still a member of the Utrecht guild in 1665. Most of Willem Ormea's many fish still lifes show fish on a beach. The seascapes and coastal view in the background were often executed by members of the Willaerts family. Although frequent, such collaborative efforts were rarely signed by both painters.

Cat. nos. 31 and 32; fig. 30, p. 47; figs. 31 and 32, p. 48

Joris (?) or François (?) or Guiliam (?) **Paludanus** active before 1674

A fish still life and a fruit still life by 'Paludanus' are recorded in a detailed Dordrecht inventory of 1674. Earlier, a 'chimney piece with little birds [probably a game still life] by Joris Paludaen' was recorded in a 1623 Antwerp inventory. The latter painter can be found in the records of the Antwerp guild, to which he was admitted in 1601. While Joris could also have been responsible for the still lifes in the Dordrecht collection, this might also have been François Paludanus, born around 1630 in Zevenbergen and working in Amsterdam in 1664-1669. A third candidate for the fish still life is Guiliam Paludanus, born in Malines and active in Haarlem between 1618 and 1625.

Clara **Peeters** active 1607 - in or after 1621

No documents have been found containing information about the life of this earliest-known female still-life painter. She was probably born in the 1580s, and most likely trained in Antwerp shortly after 1600. The dates of her still lifes, including various fish still lifes, range from 1607 to 1621; it is not plausible that she painted much after 1621. Her remarkable oeuvre must be placed within the context of the Antwerp school of her time.

However, Clara Peeters' name does not appear in the records of the Antwerp guild, which began admitting women as masters between 1602 and 1605. Nor have any of her works yet been traced in contemporary Antwerp inventories (nor anywhere else, for that matter), but at least three of her panels and paintings on copper bear an Antwerp mark. Peeters' influence on Nicolaes Cave, her somewhat obscure Antwerp-based epigone, suggests that she in any case worked in the vicinity of Antwerp. Catalogues

raisonnés in Greindl 1983, Hairs 1955, 1965 and 1985, and Hibbs-Decoteau 1992.

Cat. nos. 5 and 6; fig. 5, p. 23

Pieter **Pietersz.** Antwerp c. 1541 - 1603 Amsterdam

He was the son of Pieter Aertsen, who was his teacher and who moved the family to Amsterdam around 1556. Pietersz. lived and worked in Amsterdam except for the 1570s, which he spent in Haarlem. He is known chiefly for his portraits and religious subjects, but he also painted market scenes, including two fish stalls, one of which is dated 1568.

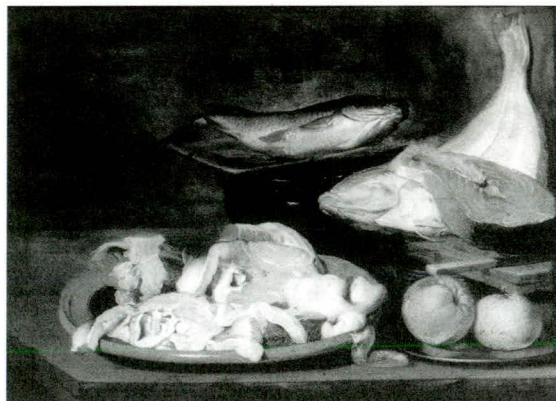
Fig. 17, p. 34

Adriaen **Plancken** active before 1673

A fish piece by this otherwise unknown painter is mentioned in a 1673 Haarlem inventory.

P... V... **Plas** active first half seventeenth century

The signature 'P.V.PLAS' is found on a still life of a meal in Bonn and on a fish still life in Chalon-sur-Saône. Other works by this artist bearing the monogram 'P.V.P.' are known, one of which has an unsigned fish piece as its pendant. While these works appear to be fairly early (1630s or 40s) and were likely painted in Flanders, their maker has yet to be securely identified. Greindl's (1983) conclusion that this artist cannot be the portraitist Pieter van der Plas who worked in Brussels from 1619 to after 1646 seems justified. She drew attention to a Pieter van de Plassen active in Brussels in 1636, of whom it is otherwise only known that he was born near Alkmaar.



P. V. Plas,
Fish still life.
Oil on panel, 55.5 x 72.5 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

Pieter de **Putter** c. 1600 - 20 Nov. 1659b Beverwijk

De Putter was probably born in Middelburg, from where his family moved to The Hague before 1605. His father, Joost de Putter, may well have taught him. He spent his entire working life in The Hague, moving to Beverwijk just a year before his death, where his burial was recorded. The artist consistently signed with a complex monogram, 'DPVTR' (with the P inside the D). He also produced the occasional portrait and fishermen's sheds with one or two figures. De Putter was a prolific painter of fish, and only a few still lifes of other subjects by him are known.

Cat. nos. 16 and 17; fig. 21, p. 37; fig. 25, p. 41

Crispijn van den **Queborn** The Hague 1604 - 25 Nov. 1652b The Hague

Except for a stay in Utrecht in 1628, Queborn worked in The Hague throughout his life and was taught there by his father. He painted portraits, but was mainly active as an engraver. A single fish still life by him is known. Monogrammed 'CVQ', it presents a cat near a pile of freshwater fish and is reminiscent of the work of his brother-in-law Pieter de Putter.



Crispijn van den Queborn,
Fish still life with a cat.
Oil on panel, size unknown.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

Salomon van **Ruysdael** (also known as Salomon de Gooyer)

Naarden 1600/03 - 3 Nov. 1670b Haarlem

He is first mentioned in Haarlem in 1623 as a member of the local guild. Best known as a landscape painter (monograph Stechow 1975), he also painted some still lifes with dead birds, and 'a large piece with fish by Ruysdael' is included in a 1678 Leiden inventory.

François **Ryckhals** Middelburg 3 May 1609b - 29 July 1647b Middelburg

The artist was active in Dordrecht in 1633-1634, but was back in Middelburg by 1638. He is known mainly for barn interiors and landscapes with animals. Dated paintings have been preserved from 1635 to 1645, and his earliest known work is a drawing of 1632. Ryckhals painted a number of individual fish still lifes, often with a seascape in the background. Monograph with catalogue raisonné Buma 1994, supplemented in *Oud Holland* 1995. Cat. no. 50; fig. 54, p. 69

Jan Baptiste (I) de **Saive** Namur c. 1540 - 6 April 1624 Malines

Thought by some to have been a pupil of Lambert Lombard in Liège, he was still recorded in Namur in 1578. He moved to Brussels sometime before 1590, where archducal commissions added lustre to his reputation. He had left Brussels by 1594, working in Namur as well as in Malines, where he settled in 1603. He produced market scenes with prominent figures, including a series of six paintings representing the months of the year. He painted primarily market and kitchen scenes with prominent still-life elements, including a fish stall.

Fig. 2, p. 20

Jan Baptiste (II) de **Saive** Malines 1597 - in or after 1641

He was probably trained by his father Jan Baptiste (I) de Saive. A signed market scene formerly attributed to Saive senior was later given to Jan Baptiste (II). If it is indeed his work, the costumes are decidedly archaic. The same may be said of several related works that have been in the art trade, mainly market scenes in the Aertsen-Beuckelaer tradition, including several fish markets. However, several of these works incorporate more 'modern' elements. In view of the paintings' varying quality, it seems likely that the two Saives ran a fairly large workshop that produced these kinds of sizeable market scenes at a steady rate.

Fig. 2, p. 20

Pieter van **Schaeyenborgh** active 1635 [1610?] - in or after 1657

The artist may be identical to Peeter Schaeyenborch who was a pupil of Daniël Christiaenssens in Antwerp in 1610. He is first recorded (in the North)

when he joined the Alkmaar guild in 1635. He was still working in Alkmaar in 1656-1657, when he painted two fish still lifes for a local almshouse. As far as is known Van Schaeyenborgh painted only fish still lifes. Cat. no. 40; fig. 43, p. 59

Aelbert van der **Schoor** before 1603? - in or after 1672

Documented in Utrecht between 1620 and 1672, he worked intermittently in other towns as well, including Dordrecht and perhaps Enkhuizen. He was committed to the Utrecht madhouse from 1666 to his death, and hence unlikely to have continued painting. Portraits, Caravaggesque history and genre scenes as well as a few *vanitas* still lifes by the artist are known. In 1643 he painted the figure in a still life by Ambrosius (II) Bosschaert. Dated still lifes by the artist from the 1650s to 1662 are known. Fish ranked among his favourite subjects. Monograph and catalogue raisonné by Van den Brink 1994 and Bok 1994.

Fig. 35, p. 51



Aelbert van der Schoor,
Fish on a beach, 1658.
Oil on panel, 11 x 56 cm (fragment).
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

Peeter **Simons** active 1629 - after 1636

He joined the Antwerp guild in 1629 as the son of a master painter, probably Michiel (I) Simons. A 1644 Antwerp inventory is the only source in which he is mentioned as the maker of a (fish) still life.

Frans **Snijders** Antwerp 11 Nov. 1579b - 19 Aug. 1657 Antwerp

Snijders was a pupil of Pieter (II) Brueghel in 1593. He was accepted as a master in 1602 and soon acquired a fine reputation. He travelled to Rome and then on to Milan in early 1608. He was back in Antwerp by mid-1609 and judging from his few dated works, his characteristic personal style with its flowing movement and glowing colours had reached maturity by 1613. Snijders lived in Antwerp for the rest of his life and was regularly asked

by Rubens to paint still-life motifs and animals in the latter's larger compositions. He died a successful and rich painter. His versatile production includes hunting and animal scenes, animal studies, and a wide variety of still lifes. Dated works range from 1603 to 1651. A few pure fish still lifes by Snijders are known, but his fish markets were particularly influential. Monographs Robels 1989 (with catalogue raisonné) and Koslow 1995. Cat. nos. 2-4; figs. 3 and 4, p. 21; fig. 1, p. 76

Joris van **Son** Antwerp 24 Sep. 1623b - 25 June 1667b Antwerp

Van Son joined the Antwerp guild in 1643. His teacher has not been identified, but he was clearly influenced by Jan Dz. de Heem. Only one still life of fish by him is known, from 1656, of fish on a beach, which is part of a series of the Four Elements. Catalogue raisonné in Greindl 1983.

Fig. 14, p. 31

Petrus **Staverenus** active 1635 - in or after 1654

The artist is first mentioned when he joined the guild in The Hague in 1635; he was still active there in 1654. Known mainly for (kitchen) genre scenes, he was also a keen painter of fish, also in a few fish still lifes.

Fig. 28, p. 45; fig. 29, p. 46

Petrus Staverenus,
'Elck wat Wils',
Still life with fish, a cat and a dog.
Oil on panel, 75 x 105 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague



Harmen **Steenwijck** Delft c. 1612 - in or after 1656

Steenwijck was sent to train with his uncle David Bailly in Leiden in 1628. He was back in Delft between 1633 and 1636, and joined the guild in 1636. He sailed to Indonesia with the merchant fleet in 1654-1655 and was last recorded in Delft on 6 January 1656. The artist is known chiefly for relatively small still lifes on panel, often combining fruit, fish and game, although several could qualify as fish still lifes. He also painted an impressive fish stall. Cat. nos. 44 and 45; fig. 48, p. 63

Abraham **Susenier** Leiden c. 1620 - between 1666 and May 1672

Susenier lived in The Hague in 1640 and following years. We do not know who his teacher was. He was married in Dordrecht in 1646 and joined the guild in the same year. As far as is known, he worked in Dordrecht for the rest of his life. His last known dated work is from 1666. When his wife was buried in May 1672, she was recorded as his widow. Susenier painted several types of still life, mostly including fruit, but one still life of fish is known, monogrammed and dated 1661.

Fig. 53, p. 67

Adriaen van **Utrecht** Antwerpen 12 jan 1599 - autumn 1652 Antwerpen

Van Utrecht was a pupil of Herman de Rijt in 1614. Upon returning from a trip to Italy he became a master of the Antwerp guild in 1625. He is known as a painter of still lifes of fruit, game and – occasionally – flowers, as well as of poultry yards. Fish often occur in Van Utrecht's still lifes in combination with other food, particularly in his elaborate kitchen scenes, although still lifes of primarily fish are known as well. Catalogue raisonné in Greindl 1983. Cat. no. 9; fig. 9, p. 26

Wallérant **Vaillant** Lille 30 May 1623b - 28 Aug. 1677b Amsterdam

Vaillant is said to have trained under Erasmus Quellinus in Antwerp. He joined the guild in Middelburg in 1647 but left for Amsterdam not long thereafter. The artist worked in Frankfurt around 1656-1659 and in Paris around 1659-1663, subsequently returning to Amsterdam. He is known as a painter of portraits, still lifes of game, *trompe l'oeils* and some genre

pieces. The cat seen in some of his game still lifes reappears in an unsigned fish piece.

Cat. no. 42

Pieter (I) van **Veen** Leiden 1563 - 30 Nov. 1629 The Hague

After a sojourn in Liège as of 1572, Van Veen returned to Leiden to read law in 1585. He had a successful career as a lawyer in The Hague from 1598 onwards. Painting was his hobby, and according to his daughter he painted some 400 works in oils. From old inventories it is known that fruit and game still lifes were among his favourite subjects, but he is also mentioned as a painter of fish and a 'kitchen'.

Pieter (II) **Verbeeck** active 1663 - in or after 1674

A small number of fish still lifes in predominantly sandy-brown tones and signed 'Verbeek' and 'P. Verbeek' allow the artist to be identified as Pieter Verbeeck, who joined the guild in The Hague as a decorative painter in 1663. The style of these paintings is quite consistent with that of other Hague works (for instance by Van Beijeren and Van Duijnen). Dates, found on all his signed works, are difficult to decipher but must probably be read as 1664, 1666 and 1674.

Cat. no. 25

Jacomo (Jacobus) **Victors** Amsterdam c. 1640 - 5 Dec. 1705 Amsterdam

He is recorded as a tradesman (specifically in beds, blankets and feathers) in Amsterdam from 1671 until his death. His 20-year older half-brother Jan, a painter by profession, may well have inspired and taught him. Jacomo was already painting as a young man when he was in Italy – notably Venice around 1662-1664. He returned to Amsterdam, marrying there in 1671, and painted most of his known dated works in the four following years. While presently known for his poultry scenes, he is included here for a fish piece (of a cut of salmon) mentioned – together with five poultry scenes – in the inventory drawn up at his death. Moreover, a fish still life (including his characteristic agitated cat) can, in fact, be attributed to him today.

Fig. 41, p. 57

Abraham **Vinck** Hamburg, active around 1600 - 28 Oct. 1619b Amsterdam

Vinck is first documented in Naples in 1600 and again in 1606. He was working in Amsterdam as of 1610, or soon thereafter. He is known as a portraitist, but the list of paintings in his estate suggests that he depicted all sorts of subjects, including still lifes, along with fruit pieces and fish markets. Old documents make the impression that he was chiefly a copyist of artists such as Frans Snijders.

Elias **Vonck** Amsterdam c. 1605 - 10 June 1652b Amsterdam

He is first recorded in June 1626 as a former navy corporal on a journey to Brazil. His teacher is unknown. He had worked as a painter in Amsterdam before 1631; however, since his earliest dated work is from 1640, it is not clear what subjects he painted in those years. His son Jan was born in Poland in 1631, but Vonck was back in Amsterdam in 1639, when a daughter was born. He worked in Amsterdam from 1639 until his death. Game still lifes were his main subject, but he painted at least one portrait and one *vanitas* still life. A few pure fish still lifes by Elias Vonck are known, while fish and game combined occur in other pieces.

Fig. 38, p. 54; fig. 39, p. 55

Jan **Vonck** Torun 1631 - 1663/64

He probably trained with his father, Elias Vonck, in Amsterdam in the 1640s. His date of death has not been found and is based on his last dated work from 1663 and his widow's remarriage in 1664. He may not have died in Amsterdam, but the prolific output listed in seventeenth-century Amsterdam inventories reveal that he continued to work in Amsterdam after his father's death. Like his father, his favourite subject was the game still life, but he also painted living animals. Dated - 1657 and 1667 - and undated fish still lifes by Jan Vonck are known.

Fig. 40, p. 55

Abraham **Vosmaer** Delft 3 June 1618b - after 15 July 1660

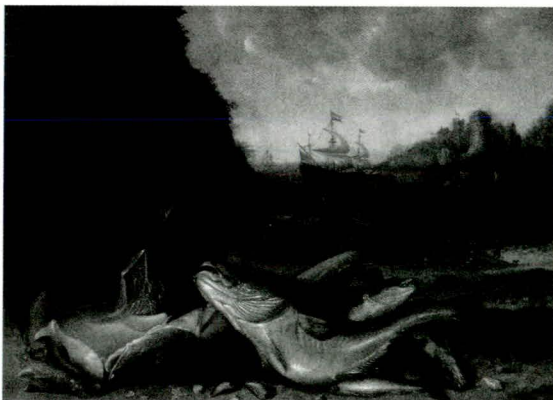
Abraham Vosmaer was most likely trained in Delft in the workshop of Jacob Vosmaer, one of his father's brothers. He joined the guild there in 1639.

Sometime in the 1650s he moved to Den Briel, where he was last mentioned in 1660. Still lifes appear to have been Vosmaer's only subject. Various fruit still lifes by the artist are known and a single fish still life has been identified as his work.

Cat. no. 43

J... B... **Wijtvelt** active before 1658 - after 1667?

His signature is found on a game still life and two fish still lifes, one of which is signed and dated 1658 (see ill.). A similar still life from 1667 was described in the catalogue of a sale held in Amsterdam on 30 October 1823. The painting in Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue betrays the influence of fish still lifes by Ormea/Willaerts, suggesting that he worked in or around Utrecht, however no biographical information has yet been found.



J. B. Wijtvelt,
Fish on a beach, 1658.
Oil on canvas, 101 x 134 cm.
Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue,
Musée Maritime de l'Île Tatihou

Matthias **Withoos** (also known as Calzetta Bianco) Amersfoort 1627 - 1703 Hoorn

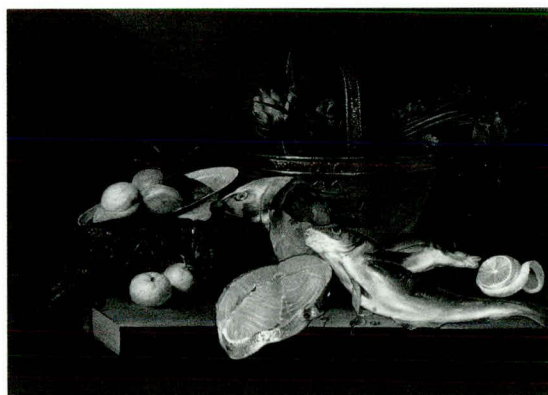
He was a pupil of Jacob van Campen, and became a master in the Amersfoort guild in 1647. Withoos travelled to Florence and Rome in 1648, returning to Amersfoort in 1652-1653. He moved with his large family to Hoorn in 1672. The artist is known mainly for (Italianate) landscapes. A number of them contain woodland elements, which sometimes take up a large portion of the painting and sometimes also have significant *vanitas* connotations. Withoos also painted some game still lifes and at least three harbour views with a prominent fish still life.

Cat. no. 49

Frans **Ykens** Antwerp 17 April 1601b - c. 1692 Brussels

Ykens was a pupil of his uncle Osias (I) Beert in 1615. He was living in the Provence around 1629, and joined the guild in Antwerp as a master in 1631. Around 1665 he moved to Brussels, where he lived to a ripe old age. From a 1693 document concerning his widow, he appears to have died around 1692. He has dated works from 1635 to 1663. The master is known only for his still lifes, mainly of fruit and flowers, but a fish still life by him is found in Sibiu, and a 1649 kitchen scene with fish is also known. A painting of a fish seller in Munich previously given to Jurriaen van Streek may now be attributed to Frans Ykens. Catalogues raisonnés in Hairs 1955, 1965 and 1985, and in Greindl 1983.

Fig. 8, p. 26



Frans Ykens
(attributed to),
Still life with fish.
Oil on canvas, 66 x 90 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown.
Photo: RKD, The Hague

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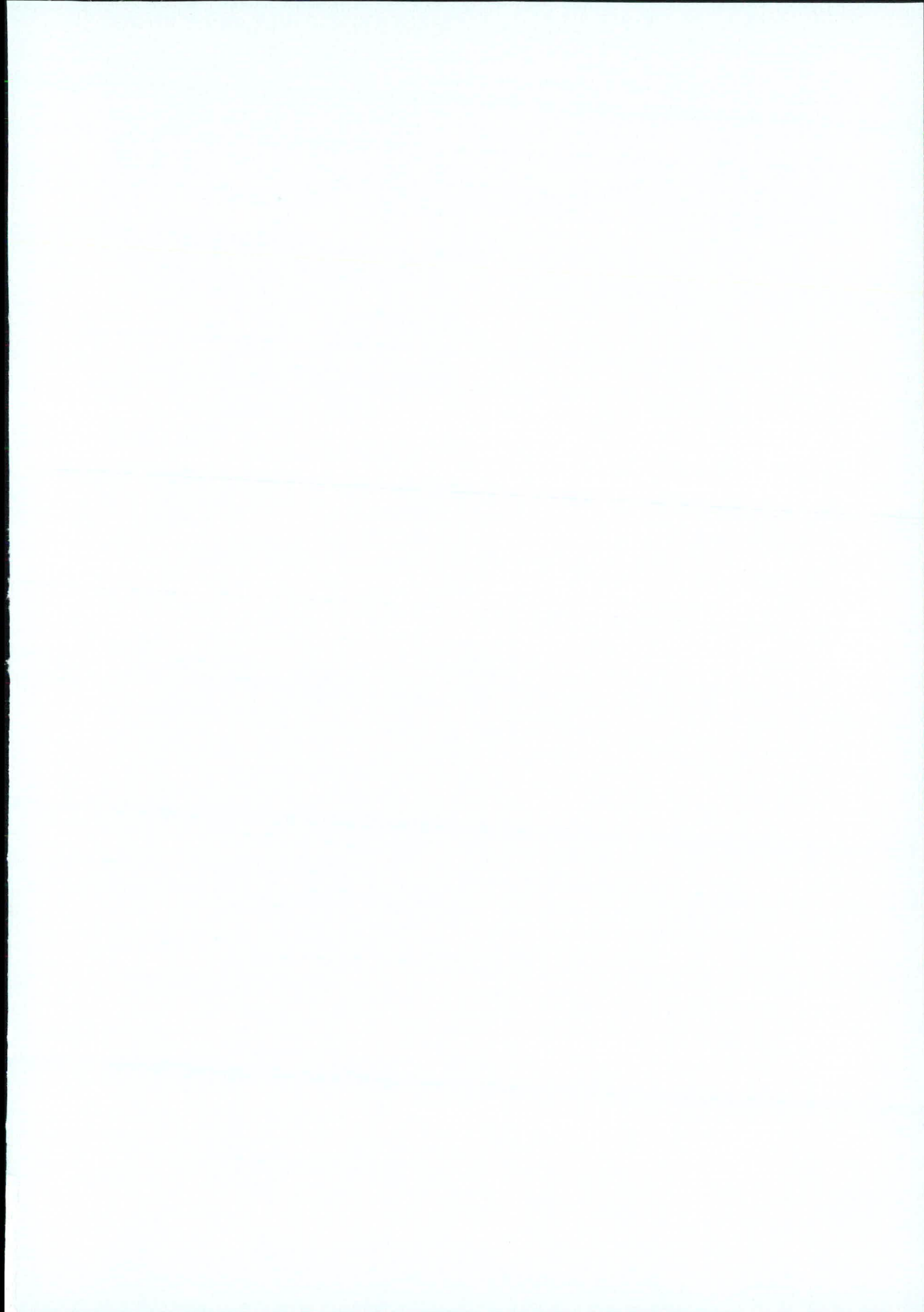
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The publication of this catalogue *Fish - Still lifes by Dutch and Flemish masters 1550-1700* coincides with the exhibition of the same title in the Centraal Museum in Utrecht (7 February - 9 May 2004) and in the Amos Anderson Art Museum in Helsinki (26 May - 8 August 2004). The Dutch edition of the catalogue is entitled *Vis - Stilleven van Hollandse en Vlaamse meesters 1550-1700* (ISBN 90-5983-004-0).

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Fish still lifes were not particularly prized by seventeenth-century art theorists. Nevertheless, paintings by artists specialised in this genre were snapped up by an eager and broad public. After a brief period of popularity, fish still lifes fell into oblivion – disregarded by art historians and strongly undervalued in the art trade. Unjustly so, as is obvious in the exhibition devoted to this subject by the Centraal Museum in Utrecht in 2004. For the first time a representative survey is offered of the development of the genre's origins in Flanders in the sixteenth century to its heyday in the Golden Age. Like other still lifes, the fish still life astonishes us with its remarkable realism, an aspect to which Dutch art of the seventeenth century owes its fame.

The exhibited works are individually discussed, as are various scholarly books on fish, in the catalogue of this publication. Five essays by leading scholars place the works in a wider context, including: the development and geographic dissemination of the genre; the symbolism associated with fish; fishery and the fish trade; eating habits and fish recipes; and the transformation of Aristotelian concepts into modern science as evidenced in books on fish. In addition, the fish depicted in the paintings are identified and described. Finally, a compendium of artists who painted fish still lifes is included.

This book is a must for art experts, art lovers, (art) historians, as well as fishermen, cooks – in short anyone involved with fish!

