

# Cornelis Mahu

1613 - Antwerp - 1689

## *A Banquet with a Silver Gilt Cup, Fruits and Oysters*

Oil on panel

48 x 37,5 cm (19 by 15 in.)

Signed: C.MAHU

### *Provenance:*

Sale Campo, Antwerp 1992

Private Collection, Belgium

### *Exhibitions:*

*Dutch and Flemish Seventeenth Century Paintings*

Daphne Alazraki, New York 1993

*The European Fine Art Fair*, Maastricht 1994

### *Literature:*

Maere & Wabbes (1994) vol.III, p.781, ill.

Cornelis Mahu's date of birth is given by Vroom as ca. 1613<sup>1</sup> as well as by De Maere.<sup>2</sup> There is no doubt that this somewhat enigmatic painter,<sup>3</sup> born in the city on the Schelde, was prolific in all fields of painting. He executed subjects of still lifes, genre scenes, landscapes and marines.

The data provided about his professional training are scarce, but it is assumed that he was trained by various masters, since his painterly style seems to include so many styles and techniques which were then popular. In fact, his talent to adopt these various methods of different schools has contributed considerably to the confusion surrounding attributions of works executed in the style of the Haarlem school. (pl.1)<sup>4</sup>



Pl.1 Cornelis Mahu, *Banketje with Bekerschroef* signed and dated: Cornlus Mahu 1638 panel 46,5 x 63,5 cm, Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp

1) Vroom (1980) p.193

2) Maere & Wabbes (1994) p.269

3) Vroom (1980) p.193

4) Cornelis Mahu, *A Banquet with Drinking Vessels, Fruits, a Herring and an Oyster*, panel 46,5 x 63,5 cm signed and dated: Cornlus Mahu 1638; Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp 1638, inv.no.118

*Literature:* museum catalogue, 1906: as W.C. Heda owing to signature on the pepper wrapping

Vroom (1980) p.93, no.464, pl.264



cat. no. XIX

When Bernt<sup>5</sup> and Greindl<sup>6</sup> state that Cornelis Mahu is a rare master, they refer to those works which were created strictly by his own technique and not those which were so heavily influenced by other artists.

Cornelis became master in the Antwerp Guild of St. Luke in 1638. He had three pupils: Lowies-Fransoes, Dierck de Brouwer and the better known Gaspar Pieter Verbrugghen the Elder.

Many of Cornelis Mahu's paintings closely resemble those of his colleagues whose fashionable compositions brought them success. Hence Mahu found his inspirations for his genre scenes in the paintings by Adriaen van Ostade and David Teniers; in his marines he resorted to the examples of Julius Porcellis, Jan Peeters and Bonaventura Peeters; and in still lives he sought an orientation in the Haarlem school, apart from a few kitchen still lives, which recall the work of Frans Snyders.

How close Cornelis Mahu can get to the style of another painter, particularly to Willem Claesz. Heda, is seen in the painting kept at the Museum Mayer van den Bergh in Antwerp (pl.1). This still life was only attributed to its rightful artist in 1978. A signature on the bag of pepper had previously provided confirmation for an attribution to Willem Claesz. Heda, even though a clearly legible signature of Mahu is visible on the knife. The date corresponds with the year in which the master started his official career and

the painting shows indications of creative independence.<sup>7</sup> Mahu does not slavishly follow Heda, but he gets his inspirations from this great Dutch master. A fully signed work by Mahu, which is conserved in the Municipal Museum of Gent (pl.2)<sup>8</sup> and which is dated by Vroom to 1638,<sup>9</sup> documents this rather dialectic relation.

### *A Banquet with a Silver Gilt Cup and Oysters*

The present still life is a wonderful example of Cornelis Mahu's desire for independence. A very steep diagonal compositional axis leads the eye from the lower left with the twisted lemon peel, first protruding and then falling back into the picture plane, via the open pomegranate and the frayed vine tendrils to his unique signature in the upper right hand corner. This twisted composition and the panel's upright size which became popular in the second half of the seventeenth century would indicate a date after 1650. Cornelis chose to depict a silver gilt cup with a rare and unusual pointed shape to express his own language of forms.

It is unlikely that Mahu intended to allude to any symbolic or religious meaning, even though so many of the objects depicted could be deciphered either that way; for example the grapes could symbolize Christ's teaching or the pomegranate reflect the Church. However, knowing that Mahu was married three times, the oysters might allude to lust and sexual desire.

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5) Bernt (1979) Vol.II, p.38

6) Greindl (1983) p.163

7) Vroom (1980) p. 193

8) Cornelis Mahu, *A Banquet with an Overturned Jan Steen Jug and a Bekerschroef with a Berkemeyer, a Salt Cellar and a Pastry*, oil on panel 59 x 87 cm, signed, Municipal Museum, Gent

9) Vroom (1980)p.93, no.466, pl.265



Pl. 2 Cornelis Mahu, *A Banquet with an Overturned Jan Steen Jug and a Bekerschroef with a Berkemeyer, a Salt Cellar and a Pastry*, oil on panel 59 x 87 cm, signed, Municipal Museum, Gent