

# Pieter Boel

Antwerp 1622 - 1674 Paris

## *Fruit, Flowers and a Parrot in a Classical Landscape*

Oil on canvas  
90 x 123 cm (35 1/2 by 48 1/2 in.)

Signed: PEETER BOEL

### *Provenance:*

Private Collection, Italy

### *Literature:*

Meijer (1989), p.58

As a student of Frans Snyders and Jan Fyt, it is no wonder that Pieter Boel emerged as such a brilliant painter of animals, especially of birds, fruit and flowers. Hunting trophy pictures (pl.2) and studies of animals (pl.1) became his specialty. Many scholars regard him as the most talented of Frans Snyder's pupils.<sup>1</sup> In many of his still lives Pieter Boel came so close to the work of his master, that their work gets easily confused. With the present work he rivals the other important Flemish still life painter, Jan Fyt, one of whose masterpieces is included in this catalogue. The high quality of Boel's work makes it possible that a number of

his pictures may have had their signature removed so that they could pass as works by Snyders or Fyt. In fact a number of still lives in museums, which were always exhibited as by Fyt, could only recently be reattributed by scholars to the right artist, Pieter Boel.<sup>2</sup>

Pieter Boel left his native city in 1645 and traveled to Italy to further enhance his style and he achieved great recognition in Rome and Genoa. He seems to have spent five years there, since his name can be found upon his return in the records of the St. Luke Guild in 1650, in Antwerp, where he remained until 1668. Boel is known to have contributed animal figures to large works by de Crayer and other Flemish figure painters. The spelling of his first name varies. Consistent and standardized spelling was not yet established and the artist wrote his name as Peeter (as in the present painting or as 'Pieter' (today's preferred spelling). His Italian sejour permitted Pieter Boel to broaden his technique. Already equipped with the best of Flemish still life painting, generously gifted to him by Frans Snyders, he added in Italy the technique of a fast brushstroke and stronger local colors. He spent his last years in Paris, collaborating with Charles de Brun to produce tapestries. There he became equally well known for his etchings and engravings.

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1) compare: Meijer (1989) p.56

2) Fred Meijer lists the following examples previously attributed to Jan Fyt:  
*Hunting Trophies and an Owl*, Museum voor de Schone Kunsten, Ghent, inv.no. 1907-A  
*Hunting Trophies with a Dog*, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Ward Bequest, cat. 1950, no.27  
*Wild Boar Hunt*, Koninklijk Museum voor Schoone Kunsten van Belgie, Brussels, inv.no. 3901



cat. no. XXV



### *Fruit, Flowers and a Parrot in a Classical Landscape*

The present painting conveys the virtuoso treatment of the flower's magnificent coloring by Pieter Boel during his Italian sejour. Boel conjures up the classical landscape of an imaginary Mediterranean landscape which is adorned by fragments of a Roman column. The rays of the descending sun filter through the wooded landscape.

The spray of flowers blossoms from a battered bucket, seemed to have served as an aid to hauling water from a well, since a rope is still tied to it. It tilts due to the weight of the flowers. Its falling vertical axis points back to a parrot. The view of the beholder is barred by another axis frontally crossing the first plane. The composition is asymmetrical and all the major elements are aligned along these crossing axes. This unique compositional scheme is unknown in Flemish painting. Everything appears to be tumbling and it creates the sensation of a turbulent movement in the painting. This bouquet of flowers in front of a southern evening landscape alludes to the sottobosco cultivated by Otto Marseus van Schrieck.<sup>4</sup> But the allusion is the only thing they have in common, because with the present painting Boel plays the card

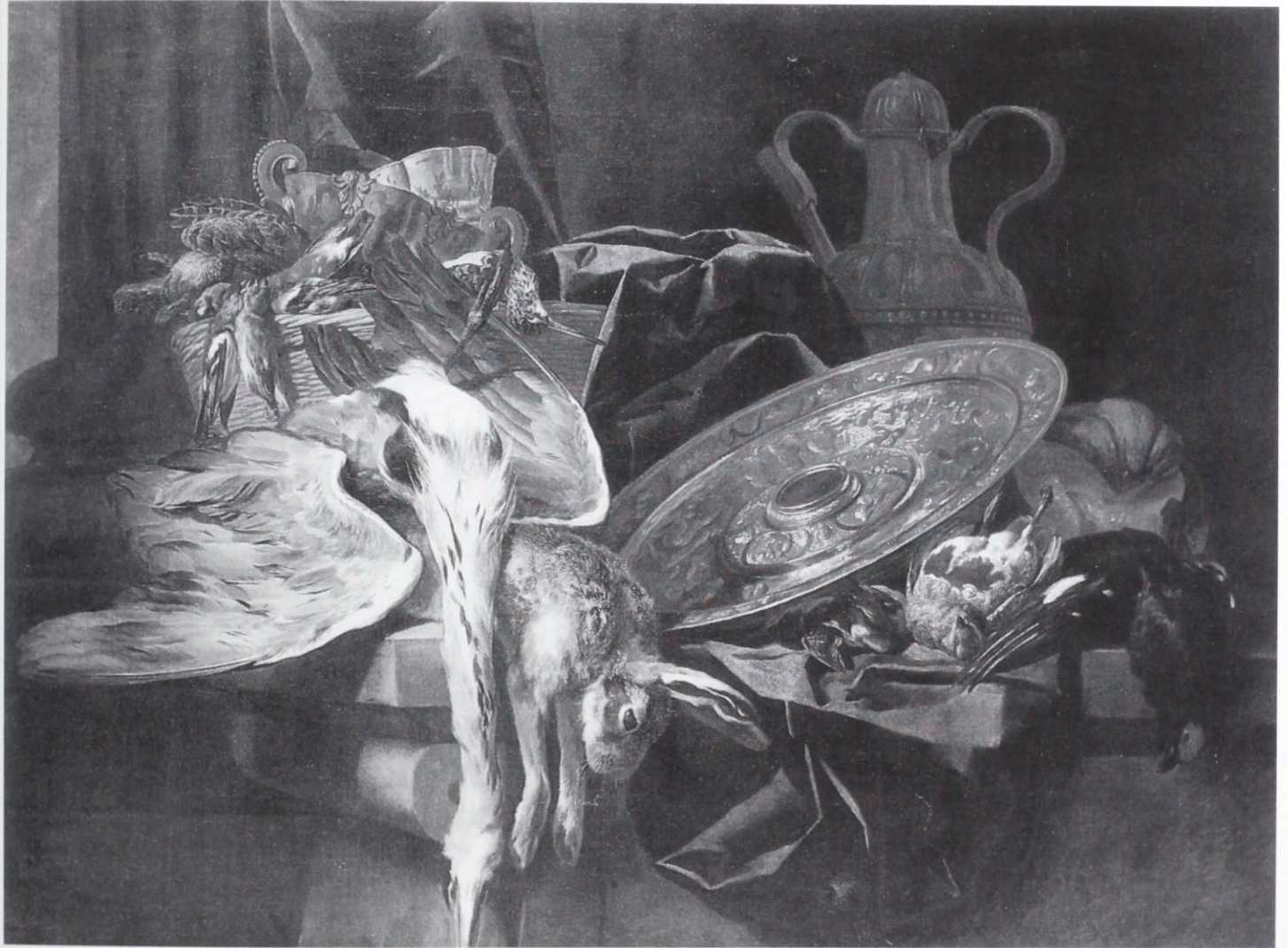
of decorativeness and intentionally overcomes the demand of intimacy. However the presence of architectural elements bear witness to the presence of man.

In addition to their obvious decorative function, the naturalistic presentation of domestic and exotic birds probably carried some emblematic connotation. There are a number of proverbs and figures of speech to prove that many human character traits were connected with the behavior of birds. The well known characteristic of a parrot is his imitative speech. Funnily enough the parrot sits comfortably on the head of a broken column which as indicated above alludes to mankind.



Pl.1 Pieter Boel, *Study of a Heron*, canvas 47 x 62 cm, Priv. coll. Italy, formerly Galerie Lingenauber inv.no.472

4) compare cat. no. XXII



Pl.2 Pieter Boel, *A Hunting Trophy*,  
canvas 105,5 x 143 cm, Priv. coll. Italy