

# Floris Gerritsz. van Schooten

active 1605 - Haarlem - 1656

## 'Ontbijtje' with Bread, Ham, Olives and Chestnuts

Oil on panel  
52,5 x 82,5 cm (20 <sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> by 32 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.)

### Provenance:

Private Collection, Bergamo

### Exhibitions:

SIMPOSIO, Galleria Lorenzelli, 1983, pl.VI

### Literature:

Vroom (1980) II, p.117, pl. 596, (reproduced in reverse with incorrect measurements)

Veca (1983) pp.298-299, color pl. VI

Floris van Schooten and his oeuvre is the missing link between the earlier generations such as Aertsen and Beuckelaer with their market and kitchen pieces and the later generations in Haarlem. As a consequence, Floris van Schooten and his oeuvre form the bridge from the earlier generations which in their own varying manners all contributed to the emancipation of the still life which gradually grew into an independent form of visual expression. <sup>1</sup>

The oeuvre of Floris van Schooten is astonishing with its wide range of style. In his first years he experimented with various styles. Some compositions are monumental, such as his market and kitchen scenes resembling the works of Aertsen and Beuckelaer, others are intimate,<sup>2</sup> while others again are "restraint" yet sumptuous.<sup>3</sup> His wide range of subjects include breakfast pieces, fruit, and still lives with figures.

In contrast to the large market scenes of Aertsen and Beuckelaer where all planes are filled to bursting point with goods, animals, and human beings, there is order and emotional restraint in Van Schooten's paintings of similar subject. This purely Dutch character becomes evident in the depiction of somewhat wooden figures certainly lacking the liveliness of the Flemish lifestyle. *The subject remains above all attractive to the artist because the abundance of different kinds of objects offer him ample opportunity to indulge in the rendering of various sorts of materials.* <sup>4</sup>

Emotional restraint characterizes the oeuvre of Floris van Schooten. Although he was a prolific artist and had plenty of opportunity to exchange ideas with his contemporaries, he adapted his

1) Vroom (1980) p.79

2) compare: Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, inventory no. 339, panel 48,5 x 72 cm, signed with a monogram

3) compare: Private collection, Switzerland, canvas 80 x 103 cm, signed and dated 1617

Literature: Sterling (1952) p.43, pl.19; Bergstrom (1956) p.104, pl.II; Gammelbo (1966) no.56; Vroom (1980) vol.I, p.15, pl.2, vol.II, p.112, no.562

4) Vroom (1980) p.81



cat. no. IX



style to the mainstream. Even when he must have recognized W.C. Heda's and Pieter Claesz's modernising approach to still life painting in the fourth decade of the seventeenth century, Van Schooten did not join the aforementioned artists in order to propel still life painting to new heights. The meticulous rendering of fruits, their various colors and infinite and miniscule differences of shades evidently provided enough satisfaction to him.

### **'Ontbijtje' with Bread, Ham, Olives and Chestnuts**

The Amsterdam born, but Antwerp based Pieter Aertsen and his nephew Joachim Beukelaer began to eliminate the incorporation of religious subjects from their market- and kitchen scenes when their society underwent a substantial change. New agricultural methods had provided enough food to supply to the population. With the experience of this wealth a new awareness ruled their society. Georg Lukács describes it in 'Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein' as *a form of materialization in which the relationship between people and objects becomes tangible*.<sup>5</sup> This caused *religion to lose its magic*<sup>6</sup>, *commercial products developed a special fascination and turned into fetishes. These fetishes almost (and sometimes literally) turned into objects with a libidinous significance, seeming to have a magical effect*.<sup>7</sup>

The adaptation of the changes in trade, agriculture, in economic and social conditions of the societies also had a far-reaching but different effect on the consciousness of the Calvinist Netherlands. The

display of food and even of culinary luxuries retained its links to religious ideas and symbols, which were diametrically opposed to such abundance.

Almost all of Van Schooten's compositions follow a strictly conservative scheme: A table runs parallel to the painting's edge. It is draped with a white damask table cloth, whose creases again run parallel to the table. The present painting evidently dates from the middle of the seventeenth century with its low view point. Although the lowering of the view point provided some difficulty for Schooten not to overlap the items, he still manages to single them out by limiting himself to a small number of objects.

This new approach to restrain the quantity of objects depicted, points to the different attitude of Calvinist society. 'Ontbijtjes' of the Dutch middle class were less sumptuous and no longer the consumer habits of the privileged. 'Ontbijtjes' can be translated to breakfast since it is a light meal which could be consumed at any time of the day.<sup>8</sup> Analysing Van Schooten's breakfast still life at the Hamburger Kunsthalle (pl.1), Gisela Hopp assumes that with these 'ontbijtjes' the painter visualizes the *appreciation of a new bourgeoisie living standard*.<sup>9</sup>

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- 5) Lukács (1923) pp.170, in: Schneider (1990) p.28
  - 6) Weber, Max (1973) p.481, in: Schneider (1990) p.28
  - 7) Schneider (1990) p.28
  - 8) Luttervelt (1947) notes 12 and 17, in: Schneider (1990)p.101
  - 9) Hopp (1989) p.35



Pl. 1 Floris van Schooten, *A Breakfast Still Life*  
Oil on panel 52 x 82,5 cm  
Hamburger Kunsthalle, inv.no. 75