3 Utrecht, Leiden, and Amsterdam. Jan Davidsz. de Heem’s early Dutch period.*

Still-life painting in the Netherlands before Jan Davidsz. de Heem

In order to understand the backgrounds against which Jan Davidsz. de Heem started out as a still-life painter, it is appropriate to have a brief look at the development of this genre in the Netherlands before 1626, from which year de Heem’s first extant works stem.

By 1606, in which year Jan Davidsz. de Heem was born, still-life painting in the Netherlands had gone through its earliest stages of development, but it was still far from a mature genre. Still life had originated in the context of religious imagery in the sixteenth century. Artists had begun to occasionally accentuate motifs within their paintings other than the religious themes and patrons and buyers began to respond enthusiastically. The upcoming civilian and merchant culture generated an increasing demand for paintings of a more decorative nature and still lifes and landscapes in particular catered for that type of interest. Also, a growing curiosity concerning exotic products of trade and nature prompted painters to specialise in representing those items in attractive compositions. The earliest individual floral still lifes in oil painting in the Netherlands emerged around 1600.

An important impetus for still life came from the kitchen and market scenes by Pieter Aertsen (1508-1575) and, shortly after, his nephew Joachim Beuckelaer (1533-1575), done in the last quarter of the sixteenth century in Antwerp. Aertsen’s meat stall from 1551, with a tiny image of the Flight into Egypt in the background, and his kitchen still life from 1552, with Christ visiting Martha and Mary behind, can be termed ground-breaking (fig. ULA 1).114

ULA 1 P. Aertsen, Still life with Christ visiting Martha and Mary, marked and dated 1552, oil on panel, 60 x 101,5 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. nr 6927

Much of the early development of still-life painting occurred in Flanders. Artists from the north were certainly looking south for inspiration and the influx of artists from Flanders in the early seventeenth century was of utmost importance for the artistic climate in Holland. In the first decade of the seventeenth century, several Antwerp artists were exploring the field of still-life painting. An important, but in this field not very prolific artist was Hieronymus Francken II (1578-1623). He is credited with the invention of a pair of still lifes, known in several versions, representing a rich man’s meal and a poor man’s meal (figs. ULA 2 and 3), that appear to have originated around 1600.115 Their
iconographic merit, the confrontation between rich and the poor, as a pious admonition, supersede their artistic merit.  

ULA 2 Hieronymus Francken II, *A rich man’s meal*, oil on panel, 36.2 x 48.3 cm. Location unknown.
ULA 3 Hieronymus Francken II, *A poor man’s meal*, oil on panel, 32.5 x 43.5 cm. Antwerp, Royal Museum for Fine Arts, inv. no. 846.

The most important and influential and the greatest artistic genius among the Antwerp still-life painters from the early seventeenth century was Frans Snijders (1579-1657). He was first drawn to the subject of kitchen and market still lifes initiated by Aertsen and Beuckelaer, but gradually the figures – sellers, kitchen maids and servants – were moved more to the side and the still-life motifs became prominent and were eventually isolated. Due to a lack of dated works, it is unclear to what degree this already took place before Snijders’ Italian sojourn, 1608-1609, but certainly before 1613 he was producing forceful, individual still lifes (fig. ULA 4).  

ULA 4 F. Snijders, *Still life with live and dead birds*, signed and dated 1612, oil on canvas, 95.5 x 125.6 cm. Location unknown.

Already in the first decade of the century, several other artists were painting pure still lifes. Work from this period by Osias Beert I (1580-1623), Clara Peeters (active 1607-1621 or later) and the virtually forgotten David Rijckaert II (1586-1642) are of a different character than Snijders’ works. Beert probably already was active as a still-life painter around 1605 – he became a master in 1602 –
and painted still lifes of costly objects, such as silver-gilt vessels, porcelain, and Chinese lacquer bowls of fruit and candy, and dishes of oysters (fig. ULA 5). Particularly in the early examples, the viewpoint is high, so that the table top fills much of the picture plane and the objects, which are arrayed rather schematically, do not overlap very much.

Clara Peeters, a female artist whose biographical data thus far remain undiscovered, but who was probably based in or close to Antwerp, dated her earliest known still life in 1607. Her handling is as meticulous as that of Beert, but her palette is often somewhat more variegated. In a group of four still lifes from 1611 in the Prado in Madrid she displays all of her artistic abilities, including that of a flower painter (fig. ULA 6). Beert and Peeters were among the first in Flanders to paint flower pictures, together with Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625), who was perhaps the most important pioneer in that field, but whose handling, a combination of being rather painterly and meticulous, and the density of his bouquets differ substantially from their work (fig. ULA 7). All appear to have been interacting with Ambrosius Boschaert I (1573-1621), who was active in Middelburg until 1614, and who I shall turn to a bit later.

In a similar vein as Beert and Peeters, other artists who started to work in Antwerp around 1610 were David Rijckaert II, who became a master in the guild’s administrative year 1607/08, and Jacob
van Hulsdonck (1582-1647), who was admitted as a master in the following year. Until recently, Rijckaert’s work went unrecognized under other names, mainly that of Osias Beert, until a fully signed and dated work from 1616 by him appeared, which made it possible to recognize more of his oeuvre (fig. ULA 8).119

ULA 8 D. Rijckaert II, *Still life of shells and costly vessels*, signed and dated 1616, oil on canvas, 103.5 x 136 cm. Location unknown

Jacob van Hulsdonck’s earliest works are relatively large still lifes of dishes with a variety of food, such as his painting from 1614 in Barnard Castle (fig. ULA 9). Since the illustrated work is Jacob van Hulsdonck’s only known dated painting, little can be said with certainty of his early production. Soon, however, probably already in the 1610s, he seems to have abandoned these more complex compositions and concentrated on painting still lifes with only one prominent container of fruit, such as a wicker basket or porcelain dish or bowl, occasionally flanked by a small bouquet of flowers. Hulsdonck’s still lifes of a single bouquet of flowers most probably were all painted after 1620.

ULA 9 J. van Huldonck, *Rich still life of food*, dated 1614, oil on panel, 65.4 x 106.8 cm. The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle
An intriguing insight into the interest for the early Flemish still life and its ‘biotope’ is provided by various paintings of collector’s cabinets, such as a work by Frans Francken II from 1617 (fig. ULA 10). It shows a still life – by David Rijckaert II – and a pair of painted studies of insects and the like in the manner of Jan Brueghel in combination with other works of art, products of nature such as costly sea shells and sharks’ teeth, an East-Indian creese, and antique coins and an oil lamp.

In the Northern Netherlands, Jaques de Gheyn II (c.1565-1629) was perhaps the most important early pioneer in the area of still-life painting. In his *Schilder-boeck*, Karel van Mander reports that de Gheyn, who was a highly talented and successful draughtsman and engraver, decided in about 1600 to take up oil painting and that his first successful effort consisted of a small vase of flowers.\(^{120}\) Such an early example on copper (fig. ULA 11) has all the characteristics of early flower paintings: the flowers are represented as individual portraits, all in one plane (the bouquet is not rounded), the picture plane is completely filled up, and there is hardly any perspective to speak of. In this bouquet, several flowers were based on studies by the artist in watercolour, gathered in a booklet he sold to the Emperor Rudolf II in Prague, a most important patron at the time.\(^{121}\)

De Gheyn also painted one of the earliest known vanitas still lifes, which is dated 1604 (fig. ULA 12), and of which the composition is more characteristic of an emblematic print than of a still life in oils as we have come to know them.\(^{122}\) Not a still-life painter himself, but an influential figure for the early artists was Joris Hoefnagel (1542-1600), who also worked for the Emperor Rudolf II. Particularly the prints after his studies of flowers, insects and little creatures, engraved by his son, Jacob Hoefnagel, were a great source of inspiration to many.
The kitchen piece as initiated by Aertsen and Beuckelaer was also responded to by several artists in the northern Netherlands, such as Pieter van Rijck (1567/68-1637 or later), Adriaen van Nieulandt (1586/87-1658), and Floris van Schooten (active 1605-1656). Several of their works border on genre painting, with rather prominent figures, but particularly van Nieulandt and van Schooten also worked as pure still-life painters. A dated flower painting by van Nieulandt from 1614 is known, as well as various later still lifes. Van Schooten was a prolific still-life painter, who, although not an innovator, contributed substantially to the development of the Haarlem still-life tradition. Kitchen pieces were also painted by Cornelis Jacobz. Delff (1570/71-1643), who was working in Delft. They mostly include one or two large figures, and occasionally a biblical scene in the background. Nevertheless, his still-life motifs are very prominent, and he occasionally reverted to pure still life, but probably only after 1620.123

In Haarlem, from about 1610, and particularly in the 1610s, Floris van Dijck (c.1575-1651), was a key figure. His richly laid tables appear to have been inspired by Flemish examples, but have a distinct own identity. Fruit and cheeses often play an important role in his compositions, next to costly vessels and Venetian-style wine glasses (fig. ULA 13). In type, his still lifes are distinct forerunners of de Heem’s large luxury still lifes from three decades later.
Floris van Schooten and another Haarlem still-life painter, Nicolaes Gillis (active c.1612-1632 or later), were clearly looking at Floris van Dijck’s works for inspiration. Pieter Claesz. (1597-1660), when he first arrived in Haarlem in 1620, appears to have combined impressions from his Flemish background with what he saw from the hands of colleagues such as van Dijck, Gillis and van Schooten, but he was painting on a smaller scale (fig. ULA 14 and 15).
In Amsterdam, in the second decade of the seventeenth century, the enigmatic painter Johannes Torrentius (1588-1644) was active, but which position he precisely took up in the development of still-life painting remains unclear, due to the fact that only one of his still lifes has come down to us (fig. ULA 24). Roelant Savery (1576-1639) subsequently worked in Haarlem, Amsterdam, Prague (for Rudolf II), again in Amsterdam, and last in Utrecht. He was a prolific painter of landscape and animals and, starting in or before 1609, he also painted flower pieces. One of his most successful efforts in this area is a bouquet of flowers from 1612 in the collection of the Prince of Liechtenstein, probably painted for Rudolf II (fig. ULA 16). Savery was certainly looking at Hoefnagel and Brueghel for inspiration, responding to their work in his own characteristic, somewhat quirky manner.

No less than these two artists, Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder was a highly important innovator, particularly for the floral still life. Bosschaert’s parents had moved from Antwerp to Middelburg, where he joined the guild in 1593. It is unlikely that already at that time he was painting flower pieces, but he certainly was doing so well before 1605, the year of his earliest extant dated bouquet. Probably in 1606, he must have seen work by Jan Brueghel for the first time, which made a great impact on his work. Also in about 1607, Bosschaert started to include baskets of flowers in his repertoire, perhaps also after having seen this subject by Brueghel, but it may just as well be that Brueghel’s baskets were inspired by Bosschaert’s. The most enchanting example known is now in the Getty Museum in Los Angeles (fig. ULA 17). Somewhat later, Bosschaert also occasionally painted still lifes of fruit (fig. ULA 18).

Middelburg, which is not very far from Antwerp, harboured several artists from the southern Netherlands. Another example is Christoffel van den Berghe (1588/92-1628 or later), who produced tiny landscape paintings in Breughel’s idiom as well as several a few floral still lifes. Among them is a highly detailed example from 1617, which clearly shows an impact of both Bosschaert and Brueghel (fig. ULA 19).
ULA 19 Chr. van den Berghe, *Still life of flowers in a niche*, signed and dated 1617, oil on copper, 37,8 x 29,2 cm. Philadelphia, Museum of Art, Johnson Collection, cat. no. 648.
ULA 20 B. van der Ast, *Still life of fruit*, signed with monogram and dated 1617, oil on panel, 57 x 90,8 cm. Manchester NH, Currier Museum of Art.

In this milieu, the painter Balthasar van der Ast (1593/94-1657) grew up. He was Ambrosius Bosschaert’s much younger brother-in-law. When his parents had both died in 1610, he became the ward of Bosschaert and his sister, and from then on he was trained in Bosschaert’s studio. In 1615, he moved with his foster family to Bergen op Zoom, where probably his earliest known dated still lifes from 1617 originated (fig. ULA 20). In 1619, Bosschaert and van der Ast moved to Utrecht, where the latter built his own career. After Bosschaert’s death in 1621, van der Ast became one of the most important painters of floral still lifes in the Northern Netherlands. In those years, as I will demonstrate below, he probably became the teacher of the young Jan Davidsz. de Heem.
Jan Davidsz. de Heem’s early years

Utrecht

In February of 1625, Jan Davidsz. de Heem’s guardian applied for funds that would enable the young man to travel to Italy. In the document concerning that application, Jan was called ‘een schilder syns hantwercx’, a painter by trade. The use of this term probably indicates that de Heem was a painter by profession, but not yet a fully qualified master painter at that point in time. Otherwise he would probably have been described as a master painter. No earlier paintings by de Heem are known than two dated works from the following year, so from after his move to Leiden, but it is obvious that he must have been trained as a painter in Utrecht, during the first half of the 1620s, and that he will have produced his earliest work there. None of those juvenile works seem to have survived, however, or can be recognized today.126

Utrecht, during the early 1620s, harboured a host of talented and successful artists, who painted a wide range of subjects. The celebrated mannerist history painter Joachim Wtewael (1566-1638) was still active there, and so was Abraham Bloemaert (1566-1651), who by then had left mannerism behind and had adopted a more up-to-date style, with elements from Caravaggio’s manner. The latter’s idiom had been introduced in Utrecht by such artists as Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588-1629), Dirck van Baburen (1594/95-1624) and Gerard van Honthorst (1592-1652). These painters were all producing large and impressive history and genre pieces during de Heem’s formative years. Paulus Moreelse (1571-1638) also painted history and genre scenes, but was first and foremost a highly sought-after portraitist. In Adam Willaerts (1577-1664), Utrecht had a capable and innovative painter of maritime scenes, while peasant genre scenes – mainly set in landscape – were produced in large numbers by Joost Cornelisz. Droochsloot (1585/86-1666). Landscapes, often with animals, where also produced by Roelant Savery, be it in an entirely different, Flemish manner. Savery had settled in Utrecht in 1619 where, in 1624, he painted one of his most impressive pieces, the large bouquet now in the Utrecht Centraal Museum.127 Savery’s work appears not to have made any substantial impression on the young de Heem, whose main early inspirer was clearly another influential still-life painter who was active in Utrecht during those years, Balthasar van der Ast.

Upon the death of his father in 1609, Balthasar van der Ast came into the custody of his sister and brother in law. The latter, the Middelburg artist Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder (1573-1621), had developed into one of the most accomplished and highly acclaimed flower painters of his day during the first decade of the seventeenth century. He can justly be considered as one of the founding fathers of Dutch flower painting. Balthasar van der Ast, who was some fifteen years old at the time, became his pupil and followed the master when he moved to Amsterdam in 1614, to Bergen op Zoom in 1615 and to Utrecht sometime during the following years, most likely before 1619. Van der Ast remained in Utrecht when Bosschaert subsequently moved to Breda. Bosschaert died in The Hague in 1621 when he was visiting there to deliver a costly flower painting to Prince Maurits’ butler and subsequently van der Ast, as mentioned above, appears to have taken over his position as one of the leading painters of flowers and fruit in the North Netherlands.

Balthasar van der Ast produced his earliest known individual paintings in 1617 (cf. fig. ULA 20 above). They still lean strongly on the examples of Bosschaert, both in style and in technique, but during the following years he developed his own, clearly recognisable style and idiom. Up to about 1626, he signed and dated many of his still lifes, but then stopped dating them. His dated paintings are, without exception, of flowers and/or fruit, often supplemented with a few exotic sea shells and enlivened by various butterflies and insects, the occasional lizard or, at times, a small monkey or some parrots or parakeets. Fruit is usually displayed in and around Wanli kraak porcelain dishes or
bouquets, or wicker baskets. Flowers are arranged in (usually small) gold-mounted porcelain vases or glass bottles, beakers or rummers. His still lifes from this early period are finely detailed, colourful, and often somewhat restless in their arrangements of the flowers and fruit and, particularly for the Utrecht period, with a degree of **horror vacui**.

**Leiden**

*The early still lifes with motifs from van der Ast, 1626-1628*

Apart from the aforementioned application for travel money, there are no records in Utrecht of Jan Davidsz. de Heem as a painter. His name is not included in what remains of the papers of the Utrecht guild of St. Luke. Consequently, his earliest paintings, done in Leiden, are the only clue to his sources of inspiration. From those works (cat. nos. A 001 to A 007), it is obvious that Balthasar van der Ast was a major influence. Also, they clearly indicate that the young artist was drawn to still-life painting at least from the moment that he started to sign his works. A few subsequent efforts that include figures seem to imply that he was not particularly trained and certainly not very talented as a figure painter (cat. nos. A 001, A 008, A 008a and A 018). If indeed he was trained from the onset as a still-life painter, van der Ast is the most likely candidate to have been his teacher, as can be concluded from the following analysis.

![ULA 21 D. van Baburen, Young man playing a mouth harp, signed and dated 1621, oil on canvas, 65 x 52.5 cm. Utrecht, Centraal Museum, inv. nr. 11188.](Image1)

One of de Heem’s two dated paintings from 1626 – his two earliest known works (cat. nos. A 001 and A 002) – shows yet another marked Utrecht characteristic. In this still life with a young man (cat. A 001), the figure, who can be identified as the painter himself at a young age, must have been inspired by images of such young men in paintings by Utrecht Caravaggisti such as Ter Brugghen and particularly Honthorst. Young men in plumed hats and in some sort of fantasy costume abound in the works of these Utrecht artists, both as single figures and in more elaborate genre scenes. (fig. ULA 21). The execution of the figure in de Heem’s painting, however, is by no means as fluent as in the works of those artists, which appears to be indicative of the fact that his talent did not lie in this area. The unusual and unique composition, however, is a firm early indication of de Heem’s inventive and innovative talents. The combination of a self-portrait with a still life, probably as an indication of the artist’s speciality, is unprecedented. The left-hand part of this painting can be connected quite easily with examples by Balthasar van der Ast. The basket of fruit is reminiscent, for instance, of a
basket in a still-life painting by van der Ast from about 1621/22 (fig. ULA 22). To juxtapose the basket with a dish of fruit – in de Heem’s case just a peach and some medlars – may also have been inspired by van der Ast, who placed a dish of peaches and a walnut at the edge of the table in a larger still life from about 1625 (fig. ULA 23). Both still lifes by van der Ast also relate to de Heem’s other known dated still life from 1626 (cat. no. A 002), which includes a similar cut-open melon as the van der Ast in fig. ULA 22 and which is comparable in size and composition to the painting in fig. ULA 23. Parrots also occur frequently in van der Ast’s still lifes from the 1620s, but the finch alighting on the fruit in de Heem’s painting (cat. no. A001) cannot be found in his work. The elder Bosschaert included some flying finches in a still life from about 1609, but otherwise the motif is rare in early Dutch still-life painting. Small birds regularly fly into the still lifes of fruit by Peter Binoit, but there is no indication that de Heem knew the work of that Frankfurt artist. In any case, it is clear that Jan Davidsz. de Heem did not slavishly mimic van der Ast’s examples but explored his own combinations of motifs and compositional schemes. This is also clear in what should probably be considered as de Heem’s earliest painting from the following year, 1627 (cat. no. A 003). This still life features motifs that appear to derive from early work by van der Ast, which was painted some ten years earlier. The dish of fruit, the pear and the branch of apricots in de Heem’s painting are strongly reminiscent of those motifs in paintings by van der Ast from 1617, in particular the example now in the Currier Gallery of Art in Manchester NH (fig. ULA 20 above).

De Heem combined these motifs – in a rather different composition – with a pewter plate holding a rummer, at the front edge of the table, flanked by a red-boiled crayfish, while in the left background he placed a pan of red earthenware with a copper cauldron balancing on top, holding some large red lobsters (cat. no. A 003).
ULA 23 B. van der Ast, *Still life of flowers and fruit*, signed, oil on canvas, 81 x 121.5 cm. Present location unknown.
The red-boiled lobster would become a favourite motif in de Heem’s still lifes, recurring throughout his career. While small crayfish, much like the one on the table in cat. no. A 003, can be found occasionally with van der Ast, his work can barely have inspired de Heem to include such much larger lobsters. In Dutch still-life painting prior to the mid-1620s, such large examples do not occur. In Flemish still life, they abound in the work of Frans Snijders, but that artist’s bulky lobsters do not appear to have served as a model, at least not directly, for de Heem’s delicately painted specimen in this painting. While Snijders’ lobsters are mainly heavy red chunks – be it extremely well painted – de Heem appears to have been particularly fascinated by the animal’s legs, eyes and feelers. The manner in which the cauldron that holds the lobsters is placed in the pan of red-baked earthenware is somewhat reminiscent of paintings by Cornelis Jacobsz. Delff, of which de Heem may well have seen examples, but again, in Delff’s work no lobsters occur either. De Heem may have considered the lobster’s symbolism, inconstancy, when he first included it in his work here, but he did not make any apparent use of it. Here, as well as in his later work, the decision to include a lobster appears to have been inspired mainly by the animal’s colour – no better way to achieve a large, bright red accent – as well as by the sense of luxury: lobsters, contrary to the smaller crayfish, are not indigenous to Netherlandish waters and were a costly, imported food.

Only two paintings by de Heem from 1627 appear to have survived. The second (cat. no. A 004) is again clearly a work that was inspired by van der Ast’s still lifes: its composition, like several examples by van der Ast from 1622 and 1623, consists of two levels. However, de Heem’s painting is substantially larger than any van der Ast of this type, while it has a very low viewing point and as such must have been destined to hang in a high spot, perhaps over a door.

ULA 24 J. Torrentius, Still life with a bridle, signed with monogram and dated 1614, oil on panel, circular, 52 x 50,5 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-A-6277.

The composition, on the whole, emulates van der Ast’s examples – scattered fruit on the lower level, fruit in a porcelain bowl on the upper level – but the inclusion of the spouted pewter ‘Jan Steen’ jug is alien to van der Ast. Particularly because of its low viewing angle, it is strongly reminiscent of Johannes Torrentius’ jug in the well-known emblematic still life from 1614 in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; it is almost its mirror image (fig. ULA 24).

We know that in 1629 the English envoy Sir Dudley Carlton saw (most probably) that painting in Lisse, which is not far from Leiden, so it is quite possible that de Heem had an opportunity to see it in or before 1627, when he painted his own still life with the jug. De Heem did not copy Torrentius’ jug, however, it is merely the (mirrored) pose and the viewing point that are similar. The motif of a glass hanging on the spout of a Jan Steen jug is a common one in seventeenth-century Netherlandish (still-life) painting. It already occurs in a work by Pieter Claesz. from c.1626 in Chicago.
considered as a specific allusion, but it may just as well have been customary to keep jug and glass together in this way. ¹⁴²

ULA 25 B. van der Ast, *Still life of fruit, sea shells and flowers*, signed and dated 1622, oil on panel, 21.7 x 30.5 cm. Present location unknown.

De Heem’s two earliest works from the next year follow van der Ast’s examples more closely in composition and size. It should be borne in mind that this chronology is according to my proposition, but the date of the first (A 005), may in fact have read 1627. At present (i.e. at the time of inspection) it bears an added van der Ast signature and a date that is supposed to be read as 1623, but that could originally well have been 1627 or 1628. Remains of de Heem’s original signature are still present, partly hidden under the van der Ast signature. The composition is an adaptation of one by van der Ast from 1622, presently in a private collection (fig. ULA 25).¹⁴³ De Heem produced his version of this composition with a certain degree of freedom. He enlarged the format somewhat, replaced the shells in van der Ast’s model with more fruit and designed his own little bouquet, which is treated quite differently than van der Ast’s original. This is remarkable, since this is the only early de Heem that includes a floral arrangement of some substance – he would return gradually to including floral bouquets into his still lifes only some ten years later. However, in the arrangement he did maintain van der Ast’s rose hanging down to the right, as well as the pair of fritillaries, while he shifted the iris somewhat to the left, and placed a darker one of his own design next to it. The pomegranate among the fruit that replaced the shells must also have been derived from an example by van der Ast (fig. ULA 26). This is particularly striking, since we may wonder whether the latter had ever seen an actual pomegranate when he painted his version of it.¹⁴⁴ De Heem’s second known painting from 1628 (cat. no. A 006) would appear to be a liberal combination of two compositions by Balthasar van der Ast, both from 1622 (figs. ULA 26, already mentioned above, and 27).¹⁴⁵ The first appears to have inspired the large Wanli porcelain bowl on the upper level, in which the bunch of white grapes is strongly reminiscent of those on van der Ast’s lower level. The bowl and porcelain platter placed on top of each other on the lower level in the de Heem, in their turn, are strongly reminiscent of the other 1622 van der Ast, which also seems to have provided the model for the crayfish in cat. no. A 003.
While both van der Ast paintings include parrots, de Heem’s parrot appears to derive from a different source. An almost identical bird – although details differ slightly – in the exact same pose can be found in reverse in a work by Jan Baptist van Fornenburgh, which dates from the following year, 1629, and in a painting by Hieronymus Sweerts, an Amsterdam artist, who was married to the daughter of Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder, van der Ast’s niece (fig. ULA 9).\footnote{Sweerts’ only known still life includes this parrot and dates from 1626. For his painting, Sweerts appears to have amalgamated various motifs, and it does indeed look like a collage. Consequently, he was most probably not the inventor of his parrot. Interestingly, de Heem’s parrot looks much more realistic and lively than van Fornenburgh’s and Sweerts’ birds. This may partly be due to the fact that the one by Sweerts has been painted out for a while.\footnote{Most likely, however, all three artists adopted their parrots from a common source, perhaps a print, which, in that case, is yet to be identified.}}\footnote{De Heem’s next work (cat. no. A 007) shows combined connections with van der Ast and an artist working in Leiden, David Bailly (1584-1657). Bergström (1988) pointed to Bailly’s self-portrait drawing from 1625 in the Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam, for comparison (fig. ULA 10). In that work, Bailly placed a quill and compasses and a rolled-up sheet of paper in front of his oval, unframed self-portrait, which is resting up against the back wall. He employed the same composition, adding a palette and painter’s baton in his drawn portrait of the painter Frans Gijsels and in that of an unidentified sitter.\footnote{Although Bailly offers a frontal view of his portraits and makes them the main item of his composition, while de Heem gives an oblique view of his self-portrait and presents it}
as an ‘aside’ in his composition, the combination with the compasses and paper links it directly and unmistakably with Bailly’s work. Bailly himself produced several such small oval portraits, but it seems unlikely that de Heem depicted a portrait of himself done by Bailly.


De Heem’s gaze in it betrays it as a self-portrait, as does his pose. He may well have derived his attire in it, however, including the sash, from Bailly’s examples. Here too, the composition as a whole, as well as the fruit, was clearly inspired by examples by Balthasar van der Ast, perhaps slightly later in date than those that inspired the previous works. A single dish of fruit by van der Ast from 1625 (fig. ULA 30) provides a good comparison, as well as an undated example in the Kunsthau, Zürich. 149

ULA 30 B. van der Ast, *Still life of fruit on a porcelain dish*, signed and dated 1625, oil on panel, 44,5 x 62,2 cm (including additions). Present location unknown.

Although the latter still life contains a melon that is similar to the one in de Heem’s painting, his in its turn is quite similar to the melon that already appeared in one of the paintings from 1626 (cat. no. A 002), the source of which is probably Balthasar van der Ast’s melon in the painting in fig. ULA 25 from 1622. In the still life from 1626, de Heem included van der Ast’s bluebottle with it, but he omitted the fly in the later versions. On the whole, it is noteworthy that de Heem’s early still lifes are generally devoid of insects, butterflies and the like. Smaller insects are also rare with van der Ast, but he would usually include one or more butterflies in his arrangements. The only butterfly in de Heem’s still lifes from the 1620s appears in cat. no. A 005, following van der Ast’s example for this composition. The lizard may well have been another motif for which de Heem was inspired by van der Ast, but de Heem appears not to have copied it from his work. Lizards occur with van der Ast.
from 1622, but in the 1620s he would show them in graciously curled poses and usually facing out of the image. De Heem’s lizard is inquisitively climbing into it.

Jan Davidsz. de Heem plays a similar trick with his available space as van der Ast did: his porcelain platter in cat. no. A 007 could never really fit onto the shallow ledge it has been placed on. It is interesting to note, however, that on de Heem’s platter to the right, the decoration does not properly follow the alternating dark and light fields of the traditional motif, while van der Ast cannot be caught to have made such a mistake. Although de Heem certainly must have known such kraak porcelain dishes, which were imported from China in huge numbers and widespread in the wealthier Dutch households, he seems to have worked on the basis of van der Ast’s examples and may have painted the decoration from memory, rather than from an actual model.150

Thus, detailed scrutiny of these early works by Jan Davidsz. de Heem, confirms that during the period 1626-1628 he was playing around with numerous motifs from still lifes by Balthasar van der Ast that date roughly from the years 1617 to 1625, with an emphasis on the later part of that period. Consequently, de Heem must indeed have had an intimate knowledge of a substantial portion of van der Ast’s oeuvre from this period. It is highly unlikely that he had so many examples of the artist’s work close at hand in Leiden, where he painted his own interpretations of them. Consequently, the most logical explanation for this knowledge of van der Ast’s paintings is that de Heem did indeed spend a substantial amount of time in van der Ast’s studio as a pupil, probably (sometime) in 1622 to 1625. There, he would have had ample access to the master’s work as well as an opportunity to make detailed copies – perhaps in the form of drawings – for study purposes, as well as for later use. No such copies appear to have survived, however.

*Books and Vanitas, 1628-1629*

Judging from the number of surviving works from 1628, nearly three times as many as from the two previous years put together, this was a productive year for de Heem. The small painting with the little self-portrait discussed above was most likely the last one he executed in the style of van der Ast, while the scroll of paper and the compasses in it appear to be a prelude to the still lifes of books that would dominate his production for the remainder of that year, and the beginning of the next. The painting that can probably be considered as the first venture towards the genre of the book still life is the *Interior of a Room with a Young Man Seated at a Table* in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (cat. no. A 008). This painting is as much a genre painting as it is a still-life painting, with the figure and the still life of books on the table taking up equal parts of the picture plane and asking for our attention at an equal rate. As demonstrated in the chapter *Name and effigies*, the seated figure in this painting can be identified as the artist himself. The image as a whole is open to interpretation; various readings of varying degrees of plausibility have been offered.151 Whether representing Melancholy, *Studium*, the choice between an active and a contemplative life, or *Temperantia*, which have all been suggested as its theme one time or another, de Heem was clearly looking around for new subjects and stylistic features. The pose of the figure in this painting in Oxford is strongly reminiscent of that of the protagonist in a painting in Lille, (previously) attributed to Pieter Codde (fig. ULA 31), which in view of its quality must precede de Heem’s work.152
ULA 31 Dutch School (Leiden?), A student at his desk, with monogram CP, oil on panel, 46 x 34 cm. Lille, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. no. 240.

ULA 32 Rembrandt, Young painter in his studio, oil on panel, 24,8 x 31,7 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Zoë Oliver Sherman Collection; given in memory of Lillie Oliver Poor, inv. no. 38.1838).

A hitherto unrecorded work by Jan Davidz. de Heem, which surfaced briefly before the closing of this study and which as a result could be researched only superficially, is a painting of a young man – a painter? – in a painter’s studio (cat. no. A 008a). The young man sits with his back to the viewer in front of a large dead-painted panel, probably of an Adoration of the Magi. This newly found work is about the same size as cat. no. A 008. Although the painting is not (or no longer) signed, it is unmistakably by Jan Davidsz. de Heem and it can be dated to 1628, or possibly early 1629. The
protagonist wears the same attire as de Heem in cat. no. A 008, apart from a different ruff, and he is sagging on the chair in the same way, while the chair is also of the same type. In fact, the ruff, the pose and the chair are also virtually the same as in the so-called Pieter Codde in Lille (fig. ULA 31), which again suggests a strong connection between that painting and de Heem’s work, but still does not clarify that connection. At front left and on a table behind the easel in cat. no. A 008a are piles of folios and documents that are strongly reminiscent of de Heem’s book still lifes that will be discussed below, as well as of the contents of the table in cat. no. A 008 (Oxford). On the pile to the left is a black, broad-rimmed felt hat, similar to the one on the table in cat. no. A 008, and on the table is a gorget, which also appears in cat. no. A 016 (see below). Against the back wall, to the left, leans an oak panel, seen on the back, similar in size to de Heem’s book still lifes, some 35 x 45 centimetres. In view of the subject of the painting the figure is contemplating, however, this will not be de Heem himself, but a history painter, unless de Heem portrayed himself looking at the work of a fellow artist. Or is this the same unidentified sitter as in the painting in Lille? An interesting feature is the large plaster cast standing on a support on the wall to the right, of a nude male figure covering head with his left arm. The model is related to sixteenth-century Venetian bronzes, which, however, are only known in much smaller size, although it is conceivable that a larger cast existed that would have been the model for this plaster example. The model, in fact, loosely derives from a design by Tintoretto (1518-1594).154

To the right, a viola da gamba leans against a chair in front of which lies a pile of unidentified leather objects, possibly large bags or covers. On the back wall, a large scroll is hanging askew, possibly a backdrop that has lost its support to the right. The walls of the studio are plain and plastered white, to the right, there is a plain wooden door with a metal ring as a handle, and bar hinges, the arms of which stretch almost the full width of the door. The left side of the plain wooden frame of the door is shown. It runs up towards the ceiling. The floor plan and construction of the space and of the door, curiously, are virtually identical to those of Rembrandt’s studio in a little painting in Boston (fig. ULA 32), but details, such as the door handle, differ. Rembrandt’s door has a lock and a bolt, while de Heem’s door apparently cannot be locked. The position of the viewer in Rembrandt’s painting is slightly more to the right than in the de Heem.155 At this point, one can only speculate on the meaning of the similarity of the studios in these two paintings. Could they be separate interpretations of the same space? Or could they be similar spaces in the same building? The easel, in any case, is not the same, but the panels on both easels are similar in size.

Having produced the Oxford painting and the one just discussed, de Heem must have decided that his forte was not in figure painting, even though he made one more effort which will be discussed below.156 While the source for his figure in the Oxford painting is apparent, the sources of inspiration for the still-life motif of books that would dominate his oeuvre during most of 1628 and early 1629, is less obvious. The discussion of cat. no. A 007 has already shown that de Heem must have been familiar with the work of David Bailly. The oeuvre of Bailly as a still-life painter, however, is restricted and very few still lifes, if any, that precede de Heem’s book still lifes are known by him, other than an oft-cited drawing in an Album Amicorum from 1624 (fig. ULA 33).
As Bruyn has demonstrated, Bailly did contribute the still-life motifs in his own portrait by Thomas de Keyser, which has plausibly been dated to c.1627. Although thematically related, Bailly’s still lifes have a character that is quite different from de Heem’s because of their rather strictly organised array of objects and their almost graphic modelling, which is in clear contrast with de Heem’s rather painterly approach. Bailly’s paintings demonstrate that, in essence, particularly early on, he was more a draughtsman than a painter.

In Leiden or on visits elsewhere, de Heem may very well have seen vanitas paintings with books by Jacques de Gheyn II (1565-1629) and he may even have been pointed to them by Bailly, who was de Gheyn’s pupil for a brief period when he was young, after which both artists appear to have stayed in touch with each other. De Gheyn worked in The Hague from 1601 to 1629 and produced several vanitas still lifes there. He is generally credited as the painter of the earliest known Dutch individual vanitas still life, a painting from 1603, now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (fig. ULA 12 above).
A more probable source of inspiration for de Heem, however, are such paintings as de Gheyn’s impressive vanitas from 1621 (fig. ULA 34) and, less so, the painting in the Schönborn collection in Pommersfelden, done probably somewhat later, that was published until recently as a work of ‘David de Heem’. Although de Gheyn piled up his books with a certain degree of disorder, they mostly appear to be intact, while many of the books that de Heem shows us are worn, tattered, rolled-up, folded or otherwise ill-treated. This is also the case in a majestic book still life in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, that is now convincingly attributed to Jan Lievens and dated to 1628/31 (fig. ULA 35). Lievens’ painting is substantially larger and more ambitious and monumental than those of de Heem. Particularly since the date of this still life cannot be firmly established, the answer to the question whether Lievens inspired de Heem or vice versa, or whether both painters simultaneously sensed an interest in this subject matter remains unclear and barely allows further speculation. Fact is, that a similar array of books takes up a prominent place in the foreground of Rembrandt’s Musical Allegory from 1626 (fig. ULA 17), while the protagonist in that artist’s Money changer from the following year (fig. ULA 18) is almost completely surrounded by heavy, tattered volumes and documents in apparent disorder. Both paintings precede de Heem’s book still lifes and undoubtedly Lievens’ as well. The latter’s work, however, is related much more closely to Rembrandt’s bold and painterly manner, while de Heem chose smaller formats and suffered less from a horror vacui than both Rembrandt and Lievens in the examples mentioned above, while his lighting is more even. Although de Heem’s first individual book still lifes (cat. A 009 to A 011) are quite full of objects, the space he leaves around and above them allows for a play of light and enhances the suggestion of three dimensions. Depth is further suggested by an object – mostly a letter – protruding out in front of the table.
ULAs 36 Rembrandt, *A musical company*, signed with monogram and dated 1626, oil on panel, 63.4 x 47.6 cm. Amsterdam Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-A-4674.

ULAs 37 Rembrandt, *A money changer*, signed with monogram and dated 1627, oil on panel, 31.9 x 42.5 cm. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie, inv. no. 828D.

Brief mention must also be made in this context of the early forays into the theme of vanitas and books by Pieter Claesz. (1597-1660) from Haarlem, which are more or less contemporary with those by de Heem. In Claesz.’s work, vanitas motifs in combination with books already creep in around 1623, while his first explicit vanitas still life dates from 1625 – with a prominent skull, but no books. During the years 1627 to 1630, Claesz. produced a fair number of explicit vanitas still lifes, in which neatly bound booklets are gradually replaced by large, tattered volumes, for instance in an impressive example from 1629 (fig. ULA 38). Claesz.’s still lifes of this type have no immediate connection with those by de Heem, although Claesz.’s shift from pristine to tattered books may well account for his having been aware of de Heem’s and Lievens’ efforts. The fact that the interest in this type of image and the exchange of motifs clearly exceed local boundaries suggests a far more intensive communication of artists, collectors and art merchants between cities than is generally assumed to have taken place.

ULAs 38 P. Claesz., *Vanitas still life*, signed with monogram and dated 1629, oil on panel, 49 x 82 cm. Private collection, U.S.A.
The present count of book still lifes by Jan Davidsz. de Heem is seven, excluding the semi-genre painting in Oxford (cat. A 008), the painter’s studio discussed above (cat. no. A 008a), and the composition with a prominent figure in a private collection (cat. no. A 018) to be discussed below. Of these seven still lifes, one is dated 1629, one is not dated, four are distinctly dated 1628, and one is indistinctly dated, probably 1628. Thus, it is obvious that this group of works originated within a span of two years, and most likely even within little more than one year. Several of these panels were presumably on de Heem’s easel more or less simultaneously, so it is virtually impossible to establish a firm chronology for these seven still lifes of books.

In terms of composition, however, the group can be divided in two: works with a fairly high view point (cat. nos. A 009-A 011) and those with a lower view point and more space above the still-life arrangement (A 013, A 014, A 015 [be it to a lesser extent] and A 016).
Since of the latter group two examples are dated 1629, one is not dated and one is dated 1628, these must be the later works. This is also confirmed by the signature on two of them, ‘JD Heem F’, which occurs on two other works from 1629 as well, rather than the earlier form ‘Johannes.de.heem.Fecit’ which is found on most other works from 1628 and earlier. While there is little difference in the treatment of the books and manuscripts themselves, the artist was clearly experimenting with the composition and the lighting, that of the background in particular. In all examples there are fairly sharp divisions of light and dark on the wall behind the still life.\(^{164}\) In most, there is a band of light falling in on the upper half of the wall, in others (A 013 and 014) the light falls in on the lower half, directly illuminating the arrangement on the table. In cat. no. A 009, de Heem shows part of the high window through which the light falls in and he even – rather unconvincingly – shows the bars of the window in the band of light on the wall. In that painting, part of the still life is indeed lit indirectly. While in the Hague and Paris examples (cat. nos. A 010 and 011) the light on the back wall suggests that it is falling in above the still life, the books and documents are rendered as if they catch the full light from the left. The lighting of the last example in the group, the still life in Liberec (cat. no. A 016) is the most subtle and accomplished. The artist shows a wooden partition to the left of the still life, shading off most of the bright light that is falling in through a window behind it. The partition touches the back wall with its upper end, causing a sharp shadow, but further down, some light is allowed to seep through from behind its edge. The partition is not very wide. As a result, direct light touches the front of the table, highlighting the foremost book and document on it. Also, the reflection in the gorget shows the end of the partition. This is one of the most subtle renderings of light in any de Heem still life, while simultaneously, he appears to be letting us in on a studio lighting trick that usually stayed outside of the image itself.\(^{165}\)

The handling of these works, all of which are relatively small, is rather pasty, particularly in the whites and creamy tones. The brown earth tones have become somewhat transparent over time in many instances. In several of these still lifes, de Heem has scratched details into the wet paint, such as the edges of pages. Although at first sight these images appear to be fairly monochromatic, they possess a richness of subtle shades, including purples and blues, that can barely be caught in reproduction.

In terms of iconography, there is also a degree of variety within this group of works. The Hague and Paris examples (cat. nos. A 010 and 011), with their explicit inscriptions and recognizable volumes, appear to focus on literary aspects. The general theme, however, is the vanity and transience of worldly existence.\(^{166}\) The vanitas character of the other examples varies in explicitness. The still life in Leipzig (cat. no. A 016), with a prominent skull in the centre, leaves the least to be guessed. While the skull is half-buried in a pile of books and manuscripts in cat. nos. A 015 and 016,
the message is driven home there by the inscription ‘VANITAS . VANITATIS’ on the document on the wall in both. The inclusion of a musical instrument in some (cat. nos. A 011 and 014, as well as A 008a) refers to the vanitas aspect of (musical) sounds: gone as soon as they are evoked. In the Amsterdam example (cat. no. A 014) the combination of the books, a palette and a lute represents the liberal arts. The globes (cat. nos. A 009 and 015) would appear to underscore the earthly aspect of human life.

While the prelude to this group of book still lifes appear to have been the genre-like compositions (cat. no. A 008 and A 008a), another including a figure appears to be the last example. A painting of a scholar in his study is signed and dated 1629 (cat. no. A 018). Like in the Oxford painting, there is a chest in the left background, this one with a travelling bag on top. The scholar has a book on his lap and a quill in his right hand. He sits next to a table covered with an embroidered tablecloth and piled with books and prints and a globe. Behind it hangs a large round map, inscribed ‘EVROPAE. PARS’, above which there is a ledge holding more books, a plaster cast and a candle, as well as an almost completely hidden skull. The pose of the plaster cast is not dissimilar to that of the one in cat. no. A 008a, but although the figure is also covering his head with his right arm, he stands upright, leaning against a support and is not shown in full length. On the floor in front is another pile of books and manuscripts in disarray, that appears to have slipped off the table. On the back wall is a large text with the heading ‘VANITAS VANITATIS’. On the wall next to it hangs a palette, probably as a reference to the art of painting, as in the Amsterdam still life (cat. no. A 014), rather than as an indication that this scholar is also a painter. In addition to this motif, a few canvasses on stretchers lean against the back wall, beside the chest.

The lighting of the room is very similar to that of the barn interior from the same year (cat. no. A 017) that will be discussed later, and not unlike that of most of the book still lifes. The treatment of the books and documents themselves is highly similar to that in the still lifes, taking some difference in scale into account. The document on the back wall already appeared in cat. nos. A 015 and 016. Again, de Heem demonstrates his lack of talent (or interest?) as a figure painter: the man’s torso is too bulky, his arms are too long and his hands are far too large.

As a type, this painting is clearly related to Gerard Dou’s early renderings of such interiors. No examples as early as 1629 exist by Dou, however, nor by any other artist. When de Heem painted this work, Dou was about 16 years old and Rembrandt’s pupil. For a similar image by Dou, a date of c.1635 has been proposed (fig. ULA 39). We must conclude, therefore, that de Heem’s work
influenced that of Dou. In any case, an early copy of catalogue no. A 018 suggests that de Heem’s original was available to artists for copying.

Although the figure in de Heem’s painting, up to a degree, might make a Rembrantesque impression, the image as a whole bears no immediate relationship with any work by Rembrandt – or Lievens, for that matter. There are, again, similarities, however, with Rembrandt’s *Young painter in his studio* in Boston, that is generally dated to c.1629 (fig. ULA 32). With that painting, it shares its general floor plan, strong lighting and attention for details such as the floor boards. The character of both paintings is quite different, however. The still monumentality of Rembrandt’s plain interior with the overpowering easel contrasts strongly with (at least the right half of) de Heem’s composition that is cluttered with books and other objects. Some similarity can also be observed with the array of books in Rembrandt’s *Peter and Paul Disputing* in Melbourne from c.1628.\(^{168}\) While Rembrandt obviously took the lead, de Heem again shows himself an eager participant in the development of style and motifs in his Leiden surroundings, and the originality in his individual approach can barely be overestimated.

De Heem’s book still lifes were probably not widely known outside of Leiden during the years in which they were painted. Probably as a result of this, they do not appear to have had any substantial impact on the work of other artists except, perhaps, on Pieter Claesz.’s choice of motifs, as mentioned above. A notable exception, however, is a book still life with a skull and a lute that was on the Dutch art market in 1968 and 2014. It has a full signature ‘Jacob Westerbaen’ and it is dated 1629 (fig. ULA 40).\(^{169}\)
Jacob Westerbaen (1600/05- between 1644 and 1660) was first recorded as a theology student at Leiden University in 1618. He was recorded in The Hague at the time of his marriage in 1626 and again in 1628, when he became a member of the guild of St. Luke there. Although a still life by him was recorded in a 1673 inventory at The Hague, and a second book still life was sold at auction in 1845, no other works than that of fig. ULA 40 are known by him at present. It would be interesting, however, to be able to compare the quality of other work by Westerbaen with the still life in fig. ULA 40, since without its signature, that painting could almost pass as an autograph de Heem, more likely from 1628 than from 1629. It is, however, slightly more colourful than de Heem’s examples. And as the signature in beautiful calligraphy has been scratched into the wet paint of the table’s edge, we must accept that it is indeed Westerbaen’s own work and that it must be a close imitation or copy after de Heem’s work. In view of Westerbaen’s Leiden connection, he will have studied de Heem’s work there and perhaps even trained with him – even though he was probably a few years older than de Heem was – some time before his acceptance as a master in the Hague guild.

Pieter Potter, after his move from Leiden to Amsterdam in 1631, also produced a few vanitas still lifes with books that were most likely inspired by de Heem’s examples. Potter undoubtedly knew the still lifes of this type by de Heem, with whom he appears to have been friends. His own works of this type, such as those from 1636 in Berlin (fig. ULA 41) and 1638 in Paris, were most likely based on his recollection of them, rather than on examples he had at hand.

In those works, Potter’s inclusion of a skull is more prominent and confronting than in any of de Heem’s pieces, but much like Westerbaen’s. Incidentally, the number of vanitas still lifes incorrectly given to Pieter Potter is quite substantial. It is interesting to note that the 1636 inventory of the collection of the Amsterdam painter Pieter Codde (1599-1678) includes a ‘vanitas van Johannes de heem’. Codde himself, as far as we know, never ventured into the realm of still-life painting.

De Heem’s book still lifes can also be regarded as a source of inspiration for one of the few pure still lifes known by David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690), his still life of a globe and books in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels (fig. ULA 42). Although Teniers’ painting is substantially larger than de Heem’s examples, the iconographic dependence on them is unmistakable. I tend to date Teniers’ still life to the second half of the 1630s, in any case after de Heem’s arrival in Antwerp. De Heem might have brought one or two of his book still lifes with him to Antwerp, or have shown sketches of them to Teniers. Otherwise, an example might have ended up in an Antwerp collection, where Teniers saw it. Another painting by Teniers, The Doctor in Frankfurt an Main, can
also barely have been painted without some knowledge of de Heem’s book still lifes. Both the arrangement of books and a globe on the physician’s table, and the array of volumes in the right foreground are strongly reminiscent of de Heem’s work, while the encasement of the stairs in the centre recalls that at top right in de Heem’s painting in Oxford (cat. no. A 008).

A group of three vanitas still lifes with a globe, books and a skull, all without doubt by one hand, has been published as by Jan Davidsz. de Heem. One, formerly in Montreal (fig. ULA 43), had consistently been catalogued as by de Heem, another, in Rouen was catalogued as by David Teniers (fig. ULA 44), while the third was at one point presented as by Jacob Westerbaen (fig. ULA 45). In view of the handling of the paint, the lighting and the interest in worn and tattered books and manuscripts, it seems likely that their author was well-acquainted with de Heem’s still lifes of books, but overall, these three still lifes breath a different artistic personality. Despite the high quality of this group, no attribution could be suggested for it as yet. Even their location of origin, Holland or Flanders (Antwerp?), remains uncertain, although arguments for a Leiden origin seem to prevail.

ULA 43 Anonymous, Vanitas still life, oil on panel, 32,7 x 42,5 cm. Formerly Montreal Museum of Arts (stolen 1972).

ULA 44 Anonymous, Vanitas still life, oil on panel, 50 x 64,5 cm. Rouen, Musée des Beaux Arts, inv.no. 1907.1.125.

ULA 45 Anonymous, Vanitas still life, oil on panel, 32,5 x 41,8 cm. Art market, 2015

Last, a group of drawings of books, manuscripts and a kit (small violin) must be discussed briefly (figs ULA 46, 47). These seven studies on three sheets of paper, kept in the Cabinet des Dessins in the Louvre museum in Paris, recall de Heem’s book still lifes, but cannot be connected with them directly in any way. They show a very similar approach of the subject, however, while the objects are shown in an equally similar organized disarray. Little can be added to Frits Lugt’s conclusion in his 1931 catalogue entry for these drawings: ‘Le peintre Jan Davidsz. de Heem (1606-1683/4) aimait à peindre ces motifs dans sa jeunesse, vers 1630, mais faute de documentation, il et trop arbitraire de lui attributer ces dessins’.
Two barn interiors

Surprisingly, de Heem appears to have played a role in the early development of the theme of the barn interior. In the literature, this type of image is not considered as a Leiden genre, and it appears to have been developed mainly in Rotterdam. The earliest known dated example by any artist, however, is a drawing by Herman Saftleven from 1630. Many Rotterdam examples combine a still life of kitchen and farm utensils with a peasant genre scene in the other half of the picture plane. Such compositions occur frequently from around 1633, in the oeuvres of Pieter de Bloot, Herman and Cornelis Saftleven and others. Unfortunately, many examples are not dated but few, if any, appear to have been produced before c. 1630.

The two barn interiors known by de Heem are entirely devoid of figures. The earliest of the two, a barn interior with a pump (cat. A 017), particularly in terms of the treatment of light, again recalls Rembrandt’s Boston painting (fig. ULA 32). The door to the right in both works is rendered very similarly, while in general there is a common interest for the details of the interior. Also closely related is the interior of Rembrandt’s painting *Tobit and Anna* in London, datable to c.1630; like the de Heem’s *Barn interior* and Rembrandt’s *Young painter*, as well as de Heem’s *Young man in a painter’s studio* (cat. no. A 008a), it has the light flooding in from the left, which enhances the structural details of the coarsely modelled planks. The sharp line between light and shadowy areas in the background, it has in common with, in particular, the book still lifes in Leipzig and Amsterdam
(cat. nos. A 013 and 014), a similarity that, next to the overall handling of the paint, supports to date it to 1629. Moreover, its overall lighting and handling of the paint are fully similar to those of the book still lifes, particularly to the later ones, such as those in Liberec and Leipzig (cat. nos. A 016 and 013) as well as to that of the interior with a scholar (cat. no. A 018). While de Heem’s early still lifes of fruit follow van der Ast’s example and the book still lifes appear to be at least rooted in a contemporary trend, this early barn interior seems to have emerged without any specific precedent. Obviously, de Heem was interested in the quality of light and its spatial effects. The construction of his Oxford interior (cat. no. A 008) was still fairly simple but, as demonstrated above, in his book still lifes he started to experiment with light and spatial effects. Although the space of the 1629 barn is also still a simple ‘square box’, de Heem ventures to define it by the light falling onto the walls and on and behind the objects. By choosing a more complex floor plan for his interior with a scholar (cat. no. A 018), discussed above, he took his experiments one step further.

As far as we can tell from his extant oeuvre, the barn interior does not appear to have occupied de Heem to extension. Perhaps he did not encounter much interest for the subject among his Leiden clients. Only one further example is known (cat. no. A 021), dated 1631, and as such it was painted a year or two after his first experiment in this area. At about the same time, also in Leiden, Pieter Potter painted a similar empty interior (fig. ULA 48).

The composition of both paintings is very much alike and both seem to be intended to evoke a desolate emptiness. However, Potter makes use of de Heem’s earlier, in-falling light, which causes a bright band on the back wall and a brightly lit spot on the floor. De Heem himself chose a more even lighting and appears to have been preoccupied this time with shapes and textures, rather than with spatial effects. In a similar interior from the next year, painted by Pieter Potter after his (and de Heem’s?) move to Amsterdam, the light has also become more even, the composition less empty and figures have been introduced, be it into background and in a shaded part of the interior. De Heem’s approach in the 1631 barn interior is in keeping with the development of his still lifes on a table form the period, which will be discussed on the following pages.

Two Haarlem-inspired still lifes from the late 1620s and a first step towards the luxury still life. It turns out that in 1628 and 1629, in addition to the consistent group of still lifes of books and the single and exceptional barn interior, Jan Davidsz. de Heem also looked at, and tried his hand at a type of still life that was being developed in Haarlem during the second half of the sixteen-twenties. The key figure in that development was Pieter Claesz. who, after having started out painting rather
colourful still lifes of fruit and other victuals, from c. 1624 began to develop more austere compositions in a more subdued palette, while maintaining his refined attention to detail. In 1628, Jan Davidsz. de Heem painted a small still life of a rummer, bread, lemon and a watch (cat. no. A 012), that appears to have been inspired directly by a composition by Claesz. from the previous year, as Ingvar Bergström has convincingly argued (fig. ULA 49). However, de Heem did not copy, but rather paraphrase Claesz.’s composition. He may have seen the painting in a collection or with an art dealer and enthusiastically made a sketch copy of it, which he worked into a painting of his own upon returning to his studio. In this respect, the knowledge that de Heem had taken a painting in commission from Olivier Jacobsz. in 1630, probably in Haarlem, indicates that he had connections there.

![Image of Claesz's Still Life](ULA 49)

![Image of de Heem's A 012](A 012)

ULA 49 P. Claesz., *Still life with a rummer*, signed with monogram and dated 1627, oil on panel, 37 x 49 cm. Lost to fire in W.W. II.

The most eye-catching difference between Claesz.’s composition and de Heem’s version of it, is that the latter left out the dish of olives to the right and moved the bread to the left of the rummer, thus creating a more compact and intimate composition. De Heem has also introduced a rummer of his own, somewhat taller than Claesz.’s, and with a foot of glass rings, rather than prunts. He appears to have studied the light in it individually, since he does not copy Claesz.’s typical sharp reflections of a window. The assumption that he worked from a sketched copy is also supported by the fact that the watch in de Heem’s version has lost some detail. He has also created his own variation of the curly peel of the lemon. Either following Claesz.’s example or by his own careful observation, he attains an equally masterly play of light in the case of the lemon on the pewter plate: the lemon is reflected in the shiny surface of the plate, but also receives extra light on its lower side, light that is reflected upwards by the plate. Since this painting is so different in character from the other works de Heem produced in 1628, it would not have been easy to place when the artist would not have provided the date himself.
The same is true for a second Haarlem-inspired still life. This arrangement of oysters, a lemon, a rummer and a small kraak porcelain bowl (cat. no. A 019) is reminiscent of that of Claesz.’s fellow townsman Willem Claesz. Heda (1594-1680), rather than of Claesz.’s own work. However, very few still lifes by Heda from 1629 or before that date are known: there is a vanitas still life in the Museum Bredius in the Hague (fig. ULA 50) which is dated 1628, while a still life with glasses and a roast fish from the same year is in the Mauritshuis, also in The Hague.

From the following years many more works by Heda are known, but the fact that the Haarlem town chronicler Samuel Ampzing already praised Heda’s banketten in 1628 appears to indicate that at least several such early works must have been lost or are missing. Consequently, it is feasible that de Heem was directly inspired by such a missing still life by Heda, in the same way that Pieter Claesz.’s still life had inspired him earlier. On the other hand, he may just as well have attempted to create his own composition after having seen examples by Heda, not modelling his work on a specific example. Whatever the case, with cat. no A 019 de Heem produced a still life in which he continues to explore the effects of light, the rendering of textures and the play of reflections. As a composition, this is a somewhat less successful effort. In the Claesz.-inspired still life (cat. no. A 012) the standing rummer renders the painting a degree of monumentality and provides it with a focus. The composition of the 1629 still life, however, is less of a unity and tends to leave the eye of the viewer roaming.
Quite different in character is a still life in the Szépművészeti Múzeum in Budapest (cat. no. A 020). Here, de Heem takes Claesz.’s and Heda’s motifs a significant step further towards a personal style. In its austere monumentality, this still life is somewhat reminiscent of the upright compositions by Jan Jansz. de Uyl (1595/6-1639/40), but since the earliest known dated still life by that artist is from 1632 (fig. ULA 51), there is no telling whether de Heem could have seen an earlier example by him. On the other hand, it may well have been de Heem, who was clearly original and inventive, who initiated this type of composition. As we shall see, in any case there must have been an exchange of ideas and influence between the two artists during the early 1630s. In the Budapest painting, de Heem combines a Claesz.-and-Heda type of still life with a vertical format and introduces an oriental tablecloth. In his interior with a writing scholar (cat. no. A 018) the table is covered with an ornamented tapestry, but that bluish, embroidered cloth is not oriental. With cat. no. A 020, de Heem appears to have been the first to have an oriental carpet play such a major role in a still life. However, whether or not he was pleased with the result, he appears to have abandoned the oriental carpet as a motif immediately, only to include it in paintings again a few times in the early 1640s and once again much later (cat. nos. A 054, 066 and 242). He may well have decided that the decorations of such carpets were too elaborate for the type of still life he was envisaging around 1630.

The creased white napkin on de Heem’s table is also a new motif in his oeuvre. This he may have derived from Claesz., but that artist never let his creased white napkin contrast in such a way with the background, at least not in the 1620s. Again, it seems possible that den Uyl’s early work (cf. fig. ULA 51) was a source of inspiration, but again, due to a lack of dated examples, this assumption cannot be substantiated.

It is obvious that de Heem has continued to experiment here with surface textures, light and reflections: the subtle play of reflections in the – cleverly foreshortened – ewer is an early feat of de Heem’s mastery in this field, as is the handling of the rummer, in which he intricately combines the effects of reflection and transparency. The interaction with the white napkin is very well observed: the cloth behind the glass brings extra light into it, while the in-falling light is focussed by the wine, resulting in a stronger ray of light on the napkin and on one of the oysters on the plate resting on it.
The early 1630s

While 1628 and 1629 apparently were productive years for de Heem, no dated works from 1630 are known to us at present, nor is there any undated work that appears to fit in between the still lifes from 1629 and those from 1631. It is a fact that de Heem built up substantial debts around 1630, so his income seems not to have been keeping pace with his spending, but it is very unlikely that he was not painting at the time. Moreover, in February of 1631, a debt with a joiner was recorded, presumably for panels. 195

De Heem’s known production from 1631, too, is far from substantial either. It consists of the dated barn interior, already discussed above, and a fairly small dated still life of fruit. The latter (cat. no. A 022) is a rather simple, upright composition in which a pewter dish with an entire lemon and a lemon peel is juxtaposed with a tilted basket of fruit – grapes, an apple, a pear and one or two apricots – with a watch in an opened case lying next to it. The apple in particular is still strongly reminiscent of de Heem’s earlier emulations of Balthasar van der Ast. The lemon on the pewter plate is somewhat reminiscent of the pieces inspired by Claesz. and Heda, but the grapes are different from what we have encountered in de Heem’s work before. Here, he clearly tries to achieve a more three-dimensional effect by spacing the grapes out and letting the foliage hover over the bunch as if in a light breeze. By tilting the basket up, placing it upon what appear to be a few slices of melon, he also creates a more spacious effect. Unfortunately the painting is only known to me from a fairly poor reproduction, reproduced here, which makes it difficult to judge the status of the drapery at upper left. It appears to have been painted rather superficially and may well be a later addition – no such drapery occurs in any other de Heem still life from the 1620s or 1630s.
1632 – 1635. Amsterdam?
In 1631, Jan Davidsz. de Heem disappeared from Leiden. He probably had left the city by September of that year. The fact that his production of 1631 appears to have been fairly limited may be related to this departure. In any case, the following two years, 1632 and 1633, again judging from the known oeuvre, were substantially more productive and, we may assume, successful.

From 1632, three dated still lifes by de Heem are known (cat. nos. A 023, 024 and 026), while seven more can be connected with those from a stylistic point of view. Of these ten still lifes, all but one (cat. no. A 032) possess upright formats, mostly of a height between 60 and 77 centimetres. All ten include a table partly covered with a heavy dark cloth, a rather flat pewter plate and one or two lemons, often half peeled, with the peel graciously curling away from the body or hanging down in front of the table. Three of them show an elegant nautilus cup (cat. nos. A 023, 026 and A 030) while one includes a cup consisting of a large turbo shell (cat. no. A 027).
Several include one or more additional metal containers, such as an ewer, a tankard, a silver cup or a brandy dish. An interesting case is presented by cat. nos. A 028 and 029, which show almost identical compositions, be it that in A 028 a large rummer and a tall wine glass are the vertical motifs, while in A 029, a silver-gilt cup determines the height of the composition.

Upon closer inspection, however, it turns out that originally, the painting in Hamburg (cat. no. A 028) also included the silver-gilt cup, which was painted out and replaced by the glasses. These glasses, as well as the additional oyster shells to the left, betray the hand of the Amsterdam still-life painter Simon Luttichuys (1610 - 1661), who must have executed this ‘modernizing’ job sometime in the 1650s. Thus, it would appear that de Heem produced two virtually identical versions of this composition. Also of cat. no. A 024 two nearly identical versions exist. One is signed and dated (A 024), on the other no traces of a signature or date can be found (A 025), but there can be no doubt that both version were executed by de Heem himself. Differences occur in the spacing of details and
in the modelling of such details as the tendrils of the vine. On the whole, both versions are equal in quality, some details have come out slightly more successful in one version, others in the other.

About de Heem’s incentives to produce two versions of at least two of his compositions during this period, we can only speculate. Since it seems unlikely that there were any specific artistic motifs to do so, we must assume that there was a commercial reason. A potential client may have seen the first painting, perhaps even in status nascendi, and may have requested de Heem to paint him a version of it as well. In the case of cat. nos. A 028 and A 029, the most recently discovered version of the two, A 029, may in fact have been the prime version, since in that painting de Heem moved the silver-gilt cup slightly to the right. He probably did this in order to have its axis coincide with the join of the panel’s planks, thus hoping to avoid possible disturbance of the image by cracking or some parting of the join.

Among the works from 1632, the painting in Birmingham (A 026) is especially noteworthy. Not only is it very well preserved, but it also best demonstrates the 26 year-old artist’s acquired abilities. Here he shows his absolute mastery in rendering different types of metal, with their differing reflexions and, moreover, with their intricate mirroring of each other’s reflexions. He also demonstrates his compositional skills, cleverly combining the individually very different shapes of the objects to their best advantage into a monumental ensemble, with the vine elegantly hovering over it, the lemon as a bright, colourful accent in the dark area to the right, and the walnuts balancing the smaller shapes of the lemon and its peel to the left.

While de Heem composed his still-life arrangements of rather sturdy objects, he left enough space around them to avoid the image from becoming heavy or from appearing cluttered. In addition, he included vine tendrils, loosely arranged bunches of grapes and gracefully curling lemon peels that add to the liveliness and elegance of the image. In the smallest still life of this group (cat. no. A 032), these motifs play the main role since no large objects other than the pewter dish are included, but in the other paintings, this *bijwerk* does not distract from the main composition, which can be held in evidence of de Heem’s talent. The seven works assigned here to 1633 largely follow the same formula, but at the same time, de Heem is playing around with his motifs and rendering of textures as well as experimenting with a new type of composition. Of this group, only one still life is dated (cat. no. A 037), the others have been grouped around it in what appears to be a logical
stylistic and technical development that follows the dated examples from 1632 to the single known
dated painting from 1635 (cat. no. A 044).

In establishing this (hypothetic) chronology, de Heem’s continuous re-invention of textures and, for
instance, the spacing of grapes within a bunch provide important stepping stones for comparison and
grouping of works. Since, again, de Heem most probably worked on several of these paintings
simultaneously, this development obviously does not entirely follow a straight line from painting to
painting, but is clear enough to allow some degree of chronology to be established.
In the years 1633 to 1635, de Heem appears to have varied his formats more than before, while he also seems to have abandoned a certain preference (which he apparently had during the previous years, 1629-1632) for vertical compositions. Dated works from 1633 to 1635 are rare, however: there is one example from 1633 (cat. no. A 037), a copy of a painting assigned to 1634 bears that date (cat. no. A 040), while a probable copy also bears the date 1634 (fig. ULA 33).\textsuperscript{200}

ULA 52 Copy after Jan Davidsz. de Heem?, \textit{Still life with a nautilus cup and a lobster}, bears signature and date ‘JDHeem F A i634’, oil on canvas, 61,4 x 55 cm. Stuttgart, Staatsgemäldesammlungen, inv. no. 3323.

From 1635, only one dated example is known (cat. no. A 044). As a result, dating of the works catalogued for these three years can only be approximate. The possible chronology presented here is based on comparison of details and a degree of development in the rendering of several individual details, such as surfaces of metal objects, lemons, textiles, foliage and tendrils. Paintings that share the most similar details have been grouped together and in this way form clusters that can be expected to have been painted within a short span of time. A development in terms of composition can barely be noted, but during this period, de Heem appears to have started experimenting with more complex compositions that can be regarded as a first step towards the large display still life that he would only fully develop after he had settled in Antwerp.
Catalogue numbers A 035 and 039 are such works. Unfortunately, cat. no. A 035 no longer exists as a complete painting, but, as I established in the early 1990s, two smaller paintings, currently in separate private collections, are fragments of one large still-life composition of objects on a table and on a stool that stands in front of it. In its details, such as the oysters and the lemon peels, the painting is very close to the dated example from 1633 (cat. no. A 037), particularly when we allow for minor differences that can be the result of the different supports: the larger (cut) painting is on canvas, while the dated example is on panel. It is interesting to note that up to 1633, de Heem worked exclusively on panel, but in 1633 he apparently started to opt for canvas more often, both for smaller and for larger works. The rummer in cat. A 035 has been placed on top of a silver salt cellar in exactly the same way as in cat. no. A 024, which is dated 1632. These similarities place the painting quite securely in 1632/33. The left-hand fragment, on its own, is something of an awkward composition. The right-hand fragment, however, can easily compete with other upright compositions by de Heem from the period, and from that point of view it is not surprising that it had not been recognized as a fragment earlier. But with the stool, de Heem added an extra compositional element on to one of his usual vertical still lifes, thus creating a different and new type of ‘stepped’ composition. This ‘stepped’ composition is further explored in another large still life on canvas, also in a private collection (cat. no. A 039).
Here, rather than placing an additional level beside or in front of the table, de Heem has built an additional level on top of it, draping it with the same heavy, fringed tablecloth we encountered in many previous works. The choice of objects is clearly from stock, although, bearing in mind that he had only recently left Leiden profoundly surged in debts, this ‘stock’ should probably be considered as a combination of drawn studies, memory and imagination, rather than as a collection of costly objects de Heem owned himself. We see a large pewter basin that already featured in the 1631 barn interior, combined with a ewer that may have made up a set with it, and that he already portrayed without the basin in the painting now in Birmingham. The nautilus cup is the same object that appears in various still lifes from the previous year (cat. nos. A 023, 026, 030), while the relatively tall rummer also occurred frequently already. Here, more than in the previous example, de Heem has succeeded to produce a unified composition. It would not be easy to cut this canvas into two autonomous still lifes, due to the large, obliquely placed basin that unites the two levels.

De Heem attained a similar stepped effect in an upright composition in Brussels (cat. no. A 040, illustrated above), which is unfortunately not very well preserved, by placing a high basket to the right in the composition. The basket contains various types of fruit, of which the apricots provide a colour accent in the upper right area.
De Heem’s palette during this period is generally restricted to a wide array of grey and brown tones, while in every still life, there is at least one bright accent of colour, mostly in the form of a lemon. Occasionally, the lemon’s yellow accent is supplemented with the bright red of a pomegranate or a lobster. In a charming little panel in Toronto (cat. no. A 036), probably reduced in its height, colour accents consist of the yellow, half-peeled lemon, two pink roses and a few bright red cherries.203

Cat. no. A 042, only known to me from a black and white photograph, must also be a rather colourful image, in which the cool tone of a silver cup is contrasting with a yellow lemon, a red lobster and an orange. Probably, however, it does not make an abundantly colourful impression. In other related examples, such as the little painting formerly with Cramer in The Hague (cat. no. A 043) and the painting with a lobster in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (cat. no. A 041), de Heem has also kept the stronger colours somewhat subdued. Perhaps for the same reason, he has draped the peel of the lemon upon the table, while earlier it hung in front – the peel that was painted out is visible with the naked eye.

As said, from 1635, there is only one dated example (cat. no. A 044, illustrated above). In his pioneer article on Jan Jansz. den Uyl from 1940, Pieter de Boer noted that ‘this piece looks só much
like den Uyl that we must speak of it here’. Apparently, however, he found the similarities with den Uyl’s work so obvious, that he omitted to describe them. But indeed, there is a distinct similarity in composition and type with a painting by den Uyl that should probably be dated to the mid-1630s (ULA 53), and when, in addition, we place de Heem’s painting from 1635 between two dated works by Den Uyl, from 1633 and 1637 (figs. ULA. 54 and 55) we can hardly fail to conclude that there must have been a rather direct interaction between the two artists.

On all four paintings, a large pewter jug, a white napkin and a pewter plate with a half-peeled lemon plays a significant role. The lighting of each, as well as the rather sturdy composition, is also similar. Den Uyl, though, makes use of a tall glass in both of his dated paintings to strengthen the verticality of his composition, while de Heem chose a taller type of pewter jug in order to attain this, simultaneously lowering the viewpoint. In this manner, de Heem’s composition becomes the most monumental of the four. The number of dated works by the two artists and the available works for comparison is too restricted to allow firm conclusions, but there can be little doubt that they were fully aware of each other’s work and were developing along similar lines. De Heem, however, was clearly the more inventive of the two and may have taken the lead, rather than den Uyl.

Implicitly, de Boer did not accept cat. no. A 044 as a work of Jan Davidsz. de Heem, but signalled a version of this same composition (fig. A 1 in the next chapter) signed by Guillaume Gabron (1619-1678), which lead him to attribute de Heem’s painting to Gabron as well. There can be little doubt, however, that Gabron’s painting is a partial copy (the format changed from vertical to horizontal) of de Heem’s painting from 1635.
The last still life that can be assigned to de Heem’s first Dutch period, since it is extremely close in its handling to works from 1634 and even more so to cat. no. A 044, is a still life with a ham and a columbine cup (cat. no. A 045) that appeared on the art market a few times in the last century, but that I unfortunately only know from a good black-and-white photo, reproduced here. The overall lighting and the handling of the white cloth and the pewter plates in particular connect it with cat. no. A 044. In comparison with other works from the period, the plane of this still life is rather densely filled and unusually square in format. The signature sits extremely close to the upper right edge of the panel. It has the expected calligraphy, but looks somewhat feeble in its execution. It is likely that the panel was reduced from a larger format and that the signature was copied from a removed strip. Such still lifes with a ham and a bread roll are abundant in the group of Dutch still lifes referred to as ‘monochrome banquets’ not only with artists such as Claesz. and Heda, but the ham is also found in the work of Jan Jansz. de Uyl from around the mid-1630s. The columbine cup is the same object de Heem depicted in cat. nos. A 028 and 029 (where it was later painted out by Luttichuys) and the tazza appears to be a Dutch example. Very similar examples appear in the works of Jan Jansz. de Uyl (cf. fig ULA 34) and his brother-in-law Jan Jansz. Treck, among others.

From the above, various observations appear to confirm the supposition that de Heem may have worked in Amsterdam for a period of time after having left Leiden and before settling in Antwerp. During those years, the character of his paintings is Dutch rather than Flemish, while his palette is rather subdued and in keeping with the tendency in Dutch (still-life) painting towards the monochrome. Moreover, the formal and stylistic relationship of de Heem’s still lifes with those of Jan Jansz. den Uyl appear to point to immediate interaction and perhaps even rivalry between the two, which is more likely to have taken place within the same city than between different cities more than a day’s journey apart. The fact that, sometime in the 1650s in Amsterdam, Simon Luttichuys modernized a still life by de Heem from the early 1630s, might well indicate that that painting had remained there after de Heem had completed it, rather than that it was imported from elsewhere (Antwerp) in the previous decades. Moreover, several of the panels de Heem used during this period possess measurements that seems to indicate that they were produced in Amsterdam, rather than somewhere else. Another indication that de Heem remained in Holland appears to be the following group of copies and imitations.
A group of still lifes connected with de Heem’s work from 1632-1634

The National Gallery of Scotland owns a still life with a rummer in a cup screw that is closely related to de Heem’s work of around 1633 (fig. ULA 56). Despite the fact that our present appreciation of the painting may be influenced by its state of preservation, it is unlikely that it is an autograph work by de Heem. Although the cup screw and glass have been very well and meticulously painted, other motifs deviate distinctly from de Heem’s in their handling.

ULA 56 Circle of J.Dz. de Heem, Still life with a cup screw, oil on panel, 40,7 x 33 cm. Ediburgh, National Galleries of Scotland, inv. no. 1932.

ULA 57 Anonymous, Still life with drinking vessels, oil on panel, 65 x 93 cm. Present location unknown.

The grapes are finely glazed and the reflections in the pewter plate have been well observed, but they lack the painterly quality of de Heem’s work and the specific characteristics of his hand in that period. Other motifs, such as the walnut, the foliage and the apricots, have been rendered substantially weaker than can be expected of de Heem. No less than three weaker, anonymous copies of the same composition can be pointed to. More interesting, however, is a larger, equally anonymous still life, clearly a compilation of borrowed motifs, that exists in two virtually identical versions and that includes this composition, juxtaposed with other de Heem motifs from the same period (fig. ULA 57). The dish with a conical rummer at front right in this composition was copied from a work from (probably) 1633 (cat. no. A 038) and the silver cup with a lemon peel behind it is strongly reminiscent of the one in another still life that is most probably a copy after de Heem, sold in New York in 1999. The other group of objects in the pastiche still life, including the tazza and the silver-gilt cup-and-cover, was most likely copied after an example by a different hand. The tazza itself is most probably a Dutch object. Similar tazza’s occur frequently in still lifes by Haarlem and Amsterdam artists in the 1630s, such as Willem Claesz. Heda, Floris van Schooten and Jan Jansz. den Uyl. The silver-gilt cup is highly similar to an example portrayed by Pieter Claesz. in various still lifes from the early and mid-1630s. The fact that these de Heem compositions from the years 1632-1634 have been combined into a pastiche together with Dutch motifs can serve as additional support for the presumption that these paintings were done in the Northern Netherlands, rather than in Antwerp.