Jan Davidsz. de Heem 1606-1684

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Antwerp, 1656 – 1658?

After 1655, in which year Jan Davidsz. de Heem produced his last known dated painting for twenty years to come and to which year no other work can be assigned specifically, the artist’s production appears to have declined temporarily. Even though, due to the absence of a framework of dated works, it becomes more difficult if not impossible for the period between 1655 and 1675 to assign paintings by de Heem to or around a specific year. His production in the first few years after 1655 appears to have been negligible in comparison with that of the first half of the 1650s. In contrast, as already demonstrated in the previous chapter, the production of his son, Cornelis de Heem, who was undoubtedly working in his father’s studio most of the time, increased substantially. Cornelis’ paintings from this period draw their inspiration mostly from his father’s work from the years prior to 1655.

Archival data also remain scarce for this period, but, certainly from 1658 onwards, they point to Jan Davidsz. de Heem’s frequent, if not permanent, absence from Antwerp. In April of 1655, de Heem twice requested permission from the guild to organise a public sale of paintings in his house on Meir in Antwerp, which permission was eventually denied. As suggested earlier, it may be that de Heem intended to organise this sale in order to clear his stock because he had plans to leave town.

Already in his Antwerp years, Jan Davidsz. de Heem must have had many contacts in the Northern Netherlands, even though actual data concerning such contacts are rare. He was recorded up north, signing for the receipt of an inheritance in Leiden, in April of 1658. He also must have had one or several patrons in Holland. In 1652 he had a print by Pieter de Bailliu after a painting by Rubens dedicated to the Amsterdam dealer and collector Marten Kretzer. It is conceivable that the artist had already travelled north before 1655 on one or more occasions for the delivery of a painting to such a patron. From 1658 until 1663 (with an exception or missing registration for 1662), and once more in 1667, he paid taxes as buitenpoorter of Antwerp, a citizen living outside of the town.

The fact that Maria van Oosterwijck moved from Leiden to Utrecht in 1660, most probably in order to become a pupil of de Heem, is a firm indication that the artist had settled in that city by then, as is
the fact that Cornelis de Heem registered with the Antwerp guild as an independent master during the administrative year 1660-1661.

A painting by de Heem that in all probability originated before he left Antwerp is a rich still life with a lobster and a ham, now in the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam (cat. no. A 191). A copy, almost verbatim, of it was signed in Antwerp by Jan Pauwel Gillemans the Elder, probably very shortly after de Heem produced the original. A second copy can also be attributed to Gillemans (fig. AU 1).

The images of Gillemans’ two copies are almost identical, but they both show several deviations from de Heem’s original as we know it. In the signed copy, the fig upon the tazza and the larger melon to the right are not included, and neither are the hazelnuts on the pewter plate, or the chestnuts sitting around the lobster. Of the orange in the centre, a slice has been cut off, and to the left there are some small peaches or large apricots and some plums instead of the bunch of black grapes. Looking closely at the Rotterdam de Heem, however, it appears to be quite possible that the artist added or changed these motifs in his own painting at a later stage. The chestnuts, at least the one up front, for instance, were visibly added after the lobster had been finished completely, and it seems quite possible that the melon was also a later addition and that he reworked the orange as well. It may initially have been sliced off, like in Gillemans’ painting. In that case, Jan Pauwel Gillemans copied de Heem’s composition before it had actually been finished or altered by the artist himself. Gillemans’ knowledge of and reference to this painting by de Heem in the late 1650s is also apparent from various of his autonomous compositions, such as a painting that was on the art market in 1998 (fig. AU 2). The motif of a lobster on a blue bottle casket already occurred in compositions by de Heem from the second half of the 1640s (cat. nos. A 104 and A 110) as well as in cat. no. A 188, but not in combination with a Wan-li porcelain bowl as in cat. no. A 191. Moreover, Gillemans’ painting in fig. AU 2 includes an orange with a missing slice, similar to the one in his copy after the de Heem still life.
Accurate dating of de Heem’s original remains difficult, however. In part, it can be regarded as the result of a further development following de Heem’s still lifes from the first half of the 1650s, in style, as well as in motifs and handling. The reflections in the rummer concur with reflections in other rummers from the Antwerp period, compare cat. nos. A 121, 129 and 134, which seems to confirm its Antwerp origin. Several details however, in particular the ones that differ from Gillemans’ copy, are more closely related to paintings from around 1675. The treatment of the fig and of the (added) black grapes, for instance, recall that in cat. no. A 243. It may be that the owner – or an art dealer – asked de Heem to rework the painting after his return to Antwerp in 1672.

While the Rotterdam painting (cat. no. A 191) can safely be dated between 1655 and de Heem’s departure for Utrecht, no other painting can plausibly be assigned to this period of about three years. This paucity of works recalls that from 1636 to 1639, the years after de Heem had settled in Antwerp. Even more than for that early period, however, it is difficult to accept that de Heem would suddenly have ceased to paint while he was at the height of his success in Antwerp. Also, artistically, there appears to have been no firm incentive for the artist to move away from Antwerp other than, perhaps, that there were too many able still-life painters active there to compete with, including his own son Cornelis. For economic reasons, a move to Amsterdam, with its booming economy, might have been a more profitable option than a move to Utrecht, but de Heem may have decided that while based in Utrecht, he would also easily be able to serve an Amsterdam audience. In Utrecht, in any case, there was hardly any competition for him in the area of still-life painting at that time.

Utrecht c.1658 –1672
For the body of work that can be dated between 1655 and de Heem’s move back from Utrecht to Antwerp in 1672, a plausible chronology can be suggested, but it would appear that even the earliest of these paintings originated after the artist had settled in Utrecht rather than in Antwerp. Consequently, I will discuss the entire group in this chapter, which deals with the oeuvre from the Utrecht years. In any case there is a substantial distance in style and handling between the Utrecht group and the painting in Rotterdam and the dated examples from the years before it. In contrast
with the Rotterdam painting and, for instance, those in Vienna and Sarasota (cat. nos. A 186 and 188), around 1658 de Heem has opted for a detailed, more precise and more fluent manner of depiction and, generally, for darker backgrounds.

For the greater part of Jan Davidsz. de Heem’s known oeuvre after c. 1655, there is an even distribution in numbers between flower pieces – flowers in vases, as well as flower garlands and other composition in which flowers play a predominant role – and still lifes, mostly displayed upon a table. Often there is a distinct connection, stylistically, in terms of execution, and in motifs, between the flower paintings and the other still lifes, which allows for the reconstruction of an intertwined chronology. I will discuss the paintings in groups, starting with a first group of flower paintings.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Jan Davidsz. de Heem experimented with painting floral bouquets around the mid-1640s, he occasionally included flowers in cartouche still lifes and in some more complex still-life compositions and he painted a few small floral bouquets in vases during the early 1650s (cat. nos. A 145 and 150). Only after 1655, perhaps still in Antwerp, but more likely only after his move back to Utrecht, bouquets of flowers started to make up an important part of his oeuvre.

The earliest example of this relatively substantial group of later flowers paintings – more than twenty-five, not counting garlands and other variants – is probably a painting in the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden (cat. no. A 192). This is a relatively simple composition: a green glass bottle placed upon a grey stone ledge, containing a bouquet of flowers. There is a cluster of blooms, somewhat horizontally spread, around the neck of the vase and a half circle of flowers above it. On the ledge there are some apricots, grapes, a branch of blackberries and, in the centre and to the left, two snails. The bouquet is enlivened by several butterflies and moths, caterpillars, a beetle and a bluebottle.

The flowers are interwoven with several stalks of wheat. De Heem has clearly opted for a different approach of rendering flowers than he had done earlier, although there is a similarity in treatment with the roses in cat. no. A 190 from 1655. The textures of their petals is strongly reminiscent of that of thin paper, in some cases of thin waxed paper. Their outlines are crisp and sharply defined. De Heem’s choice for dark backgrounds also helps the strongly lit flowers to stand out in space. The artist’s choice of flowers is not extravagant. Roses, carnations and irises are the main blooms in the bouquet, interspersed with anemones, ranunculus, and a sprig of (pear)blossom. From this time on, de Heem also often placed an umbellifer flower at the top or upper side of his bouquets. The focal point of most of de Heem’s flower paintings from this time onward is often a white rose, around which the other flowers have been arranged. In cat. no. A 192, the flowers are still somewhat rigidly
arranged, and unfortunately the state of preservation is of the painting is not ideal. The handling of
the entire lower left corner is rather weak and the fruit there may have been added or substantially
repainted by a later hand. The quality of the majority of the motifs (flowers, butterflies and
caterpillars etc.) is of a high standard, however. At top right is de Heem’s ‘signature’ red admiral
butterfly and to the right is a common brimstone butterfly (Gonepteryx rhamni). This butterfly makes
its first appearance here; it can be found in a similar position – hanging upside-down – in several of
de Heem’s flower paintings from the following years. Before 1655, de Heem had already introduced
snails into his compositions; very rarely indoors (like in cat. no. A 128), but more often in his out-door
still lifes, such as cat. nos. A 153, 155 and 172. Starting with cat. no. A 192, and until well into the
1670s, de Heem’s still lifes were often enlivened with one or more snails, usually a white-lipped snail
(Cepaea hortensis) or grove, or a brown-lipped snail (Cepaea nemoralis). In the period around 1660,
de Heem often painted his glass vases with what appears to be a transparent copper green on hues
of grey and white, which provides a convincing suggestion of depth and of reflections inside the vase.
In cat. no. A 193, the vase has been treated in the same manner. It holds a compact bouquet of
roses, a snowball, anemones, larkspur, pansies, a peony, and other flowers, topped by some white
lilies. Here, too, de Heem has included an umbellifer flower, here at upper left, as well as some sprigs
of fruit blossom and some stalks of wheat. On a lily, the usual red admiral butterfly has alighted, and
at upper left there is a dragonfly.

Starting in the mid-1640s, de Heem had occasionally included tulips in his (floral) still lifes,
but starting with this painting they became an important, eye-catching motif. The sprig of white lilies
at the top of the bouquet, though more modest, is reminiscent of that in cat. nos. A 093 and 094, and
so is the peony below the lilies. A new motif that would also become a favourite is the snowball or
Guelder rose. De Heem clearly relished the possibilities of the many fine details of this blossom and
the opportunity to render its three-dimensionality and the space and depth between the individual
small flowers. He also continues to employ stalks of wheat to provide depth and a suggestion of
movement in the composition, like he had done expressly in cat. no. A 190 in St. Petersburg.

Upon the hard-stone ledge that carries the vase, de Heem has also placed smoking utensils –
a clay pipe, a match, and a smoldering taper – and, to the right, some oysters and an orange. It would
appear that with this combination of motifs, de Heem intended to represent the Four Elements: Fire
(the smoking utensils), water (the oysters, the water in the vase and the dew drops), Earth (flowers
and fruit, and the stone ledge) and Sky (the butterfly and the dragonfly). From the earliest known
example (cat. no. A 059) onwards, de Heem placed other still-life objects around his floral bouquets,
often not more than a few pieces of small fruit, but occasionally a number of objects with a specific
significance. After c.1660, this tendency would decrease substantially. Cat. no. A 218, to be discussed
later, however, exceptionally presents a similar, more elaborate version of the same combination of
motifs. 479

In cat. no. A 194, in Dresden, however, the floral bouquet is fully integrated in a vanitas still-
life context, much like cat. nos. A 093 and 094. Next to the vase, to its right, is an ivy-crowned skull,
with in front of it – in an interesting rhyme of shapes – a polished turbo shell, quite probably the
same object de Heem had already included in several still lifes from the 1640s (compare, for
instance, cat. no. A 111). The shiny shell obviously receives a vanitas connotation in this context: it is
rare and impressive but useless. The vanitas aspect of the painting is underlined by the inscription
Memento Mori (remember that all must die) on the tattered sheet of paper, which also bears de
Heem’s signature, stuck under the shell and the skull. Segal has discussed a variety of possible
interpretations of the iconography of this painting, in bono and in malo, including Christian and
vanitas symbolism. He did not mention the prominent orange to the left of the vase, however. Oranges had appeared in de Heem’s still lifes with some frequency and increasingly so after his move to Antwerp, but here the fruit is shifted forward with unprecedented prominence. In seventeenth-century still-life paintings, oranges are often represented on a branch which also holds blossom and unripe fruit. All three can be found on an orange tree at the same time and they can be seen to represent the cycle of life. Here, de Heem painted an orange branch with its leaves, but only holding one solid piece of ripe fruit. Particularly if this painting was done after de Heem’s move to Utrecht, the orange may refer to the young Prince William of Orange, later William III (1650-1702), whose chances of being moved back into the position of stadtholder were improving by the late 1650s, particularly from 1659, when his advocates received the support of the soon-to-be reinstated English King Charles II. In many of de Heem’s still lifes from the following decades, an orange takes up a prominent position. Whether or not these can all be read as pointers to Orangist sympathies, it is in any case clear that from Catholic circles in Antwerp, de Heem moved to Protestant circles in Utrecht where such sympathies existed. Whether in this painting de Heem was actually confronting the young Prince’s promising position (the orange), always threatening transience and the brevity of life (the skull, shell and memento-mori text) will most likely remain unsolved. Cat. no. A 193, discussed above also includes a fairly prominent orange, but that one appears to have been included more in the vein of de Heem’s earlier still lifes, although it cannot be excluded that it was serving as an Orangist symbol also in that painting. An interesting feature in the larger bouquet (cat. no. A 194) is the introduction of a blossoming white nettle, above the roses. De Heem regularly introduced non-cultivars in his bouquets, such as thistles, grasses and wild flowers. At top left, a dragonfly is about to alight on the poppy anemone. It may be that the inclusion of this animal, rendered in flight as here, was inspired by works by Willem van Aelst, who often included this large insect in a similar manner in his floral compositions.

Already in the 1640s, de Heem had painted garlands as part of his cartouche still lifes – mainly of fruit and some flowers, although cat. no. A 118 (Laxenburg), includes a pure flower garland. Cat. no. A 196, in a private collection, would appear to be the earliest of a group of about five flower garlands
painted in the 1660s. This garland contains mainly flowers, but also some fruit, and is rather compact in its composition, which is in part due to the substance that several bunches of black and of white grapes behind the flowers provide to it. The flowers in the centre are not more compactly arranged than in cat. nos. A 193 and 194, however. A white rose and a red-and-white rose provide the central focus of the floral arrangement, juxtaposed with a sturdy white tulip with red flames. Originally, the two small yellow roses above it will also have attracted substantial attention; soon their bright orpiment (schietgeel, an arsenic yellow) will have disappeared, however. To the right, a brightly lit red-and-white carnation, a pink rosebud, a dark-purple poppy (identical to the one in cat. no. A 194) and a dark-red ranunculus complete the bouquet. Their colours are echoed to the left by the brightly lit bunch of black grapes. Here, too, stalks of wheat, woven through the arrangement, provide depth and liveliness. Smaller elements such as a handful of cherries and some snowdrops at upper left and a marigold at upper right help to enhance the depth and spatial feel of the composition.

In cat. no. A 193, next to the butterflies and caterpillars, there are only a bluebottle fly and a bug. In cat. no. A 194, in contrast, de Heem has introduced a quite a few smaller and larger crawlers. The bluebottle on the skull in the Dresden painting no doubt has its traditional vanitas connotation, but in the bouquet, the white rose hosts a family of ants and all over the bouquet, in addition to de Heem’s usual red admiral butterfly, there are flies, bugs, caterpillars, a dragonfly and a tortoiseshell butterfly. The garland, cat. no. A 196, also hosts a family of ants on the white rose, but it is less populated than the Dresden bouquet. To the lower right, like in cat. no. A193, we find the same cross spider, and additionally there are only the usual red admiral butterfly and two identical caterpillars.481

![Image](https://example.com/image.jpg)

AU 3 D. Seghers, *Flowers in a glass vase*, signed and dated 1635, oil on panel, 81,6 x 52,7 cm. Present location unknown.

De Heem’s effort to attain a convincing three-dimensionality in his bouquets and garlands is starting to become increasingly successful at this time. Interweaving stalks and stems and placing flowers in front of and behind each other creates a strong sense of depth. He also uses what Paul Taylor has termed ‘chiaroscuro of hue’, for instance by interspersing red and yellow flowers with less significant blue ones which push them forward, visually.482 The lighting of the bouquets and of the individual elements in them is also used very effectively. Also, particularly in his garlands, he starts to turn his
flowers in every direction, which evokes a strong liveliness. Unlike his main example for this kind of work, Daniel Seghers, de Heem varies the light within his bouquets significantly (fig. AU 3). While the viewer is looking at a carefully construed image, he will only start to realize the impossibilities of the spatial relations within it when he thoroughly starts to analyse them. One would expect the budding poppy, below the tulip in cat. no. A 196, to be more shaded off, and also for the white rose to take away some light from the pink rosebud to the right. The same is true for the combination of the red peony poppy and the blue iris at the top of the Dresden bouquet (cat. no. A 194). In cat.no. A 196, the garland is hung from bright blue ribbons and attached to branches of ivy, a feature de Heem would repeat in most of the garlands from the 1660s. The blue pushes the arrangement forward (‘chiaroscuro of hue’). For some contemporary viewers, the ivy may have borne its traditional symbolism of eternity, as a plant that is green throughout the seasons, as a contrast with the quickly withering blooms.

A 198

AU 4 Willem van Aelst, Flowers in a silver vase, on a marble slab, signed and dated 1663, oil on canvas, 62,5 x 49 cm. Mauritshuis, The Hague, cat. no. 2.

The basic arrangement of the flowers in a somewhat smaller still life of flowers in a vase, cat. no. A 198, in an American private collection, is the same as in cat. no. A 194 in Dresden. In both bouquets there are two groups of flowers arranged along slanting lines above each other, with an area of a lower density of flowers in between. It shows many similarities to both cat. nos. A 193 and 194, both in choice of motifs, composition and in handling, but the bouquet breathes more air and radiates more elegance, due to the gentle curves of some prominent stems and stalks of wheat. Also, the lower row of flowers is more curved. One may wonder whether de Heem had already seen one of Willem van Aelst’s slanting floral compositions that started to appear around 1660, such as the painting now in the Mauritshuis, The Hague (fig. AU 4). In contrast with van Aelst, however, the stems of the flowers radiate almost explosively from behind the white rose in the centre. One could argue against the balance in the bouquet that the lilies are relatively small, which makes the flowers in the centre look somewhat bulky. However, the overall level of quality of the painting is very high, with an abundance of detail. Like cat. no. A 194 (Dresden), this painting is crowded with creatures. There are four different butterflies, a snail on the ledge and one in the centre of the bouquet, upon a large leaf, the white rose is full of ants, and also carries two bugs and a bumblebee. A dragonfly sits on a white lily at the top, and there are several caterpillars and small flying insects, as well as a cross spider at lower right, in the same position as in cat. nos. A 193 and 196. The peony in this bouquet
shows a further development in handling of that flower by de Heem. Here, its red has become a bright, radiant colour, highlighted with white and with dark-grey shadows between the petals. De Heem’s range of red and orange tones expands during the early 1660s and becomes highly varied and subtle. The tulip, which cat. no. A 198 shares with cat. no. A 202 (Washington), has become a curly, twisty element, surpassing the portrait-like depiction of flowers in earlier flower paintings. This clearly is a further development after de Heem’s tulips had already become more lively in cat. no. A 194. The ear of wheat below the tulip follows this development with its exaggerated curly shape, unprecedented in de Heem’s rendering of wheat stalks, even though two examples in cat. no. A 196, discussed above, have a first hint to a similar curl.

Around the same time, de Heem must have created the first of his still lifes on a table of the type and handling that would turn out to be characteristic for his work of the 1660s. Cat. no. A 195, in Oslo, is a small still life of oysters, an orange, a rummer of white wine, and a chestnut on a hard-stone ledge, in front of what appears to be a shallow niche. The treatment of the oysters, as well as that of the orange is similar to that in the flower painting with other still-life motifs, cat. no. A 193, discussed above. The artist has paid much attention to detail: the oysters are rendered meticulously, the dewdrops, the skin and the leaves of the orange have been portrayed with great accuracy. The texture of the glass, as well as the reflection of the window in it have been studied and rendered with great precision. De Heem also paid a lot of attention to the light falling onto the background. In earlier works, already in the 1620s, he had been playing with rays of light falling onto the background (see the discussion on p. 54), but here he has added a certain sparkle to the in-falling rays which appears to be characteristic for such still lifes from the early 1660s. It is also manifest in cat. no. A 197, a still life of oysters, fruit and wine glasses. The rendering of the glasses and the reflections in this painting is highly similar and so is the treatment of background. There can be little doubt that these two still lifes were painted within the same short timeframe. This painting also possesses the same refinement and elegance as the smaller flower painting discussed above, cat. no. A 198. The bumblebee at lower left and the snail at lower right in cat. no. A 197 are similar to those creatures in cat. no. A 198, while the treatment of the grapes is closely related to that in cat. no. A 196.
Also closely related to, but at the same time a strong deviation in size from the small panels discussed above (cat. nos. A 195 and 197) is a large still life which is on permanent loan to the Centraal Museum in Utrecht (cat. no. A 199). Since this painting was painted on canvas and is substantially larger, it is not surprising that the handling is somewhat less refined than on the panels, but still de Heem has exhausted its details. Also, he has united a great variety of textures in it, rendering various types of textiles, glass, metal, fruit and vegetation. The play of reflections in glass and metal is extremely intricate. The large chased silver dish resting against the front of the table, ornamented with flowers and leaves, reflects the lute and the pillow with the orange upon it. In this still life, various motifs from the previously discussed paintings come together, either virtually identically, or in closely related forms. The turbo shell on the table is the same as the one in the vanitas flower painting in Dresden (cat. no. A 194), and the pink peach with a soft yellow stripe mimics that in cat. no. A 197. The orange on the pillow at front right is very similar to those in cat. nos. A 193 and 195. Whether or not it should be assigned an Orangist iconography is open to discussion, but given its prominence this seems quite likely. To some degree, this still life is reminiscent of the similarly large work in Sarasota (cat. no. A 188), with its dark drapery, open sky, silver-gilt cup-and-cover and its intricately ornate table cloth. For the cup and cover, de Heem appears to have referred to studies he had used earlier, varying somewhat on the details. Very similar cups occur in cat. nos. A 071, 089 and 095. The cup screw, standing upon the bottle casket, is also strongly reminiscent of a model that de Heem had portrayed much earlier, in cat. nos. A 055, 060 and 065. Again, details deviate somewhat. Interestingly, in those earlier examples the figure of the young Bacchus included in its stem is naked, here a decent length of cloth is draped over his left shoulder, hanging down to cover his loins. Other motifs, such as the oysters, the chestnuts, and the glasses, and the snail also connect the painting with the previously discussed still lifes both in shape and in execution. Here, too, the knife with a chequered handle reappears. The painting may be the result of a commission from a patron who was aware of de Heem’s large luxury still lifes from the first half of the 1640s and who desired a similar composition from the artist, who indeed appears to have harked back to works such as cat. nos. A 051 (Louvre), 054 (Brussels), and 065 as well as to A 066 and 069 for the vertical composition. The composition of cat. no. A 199 is more balanced,
However, and the atmosphere is more intimate, since the artist has moved up closer to the table upon which he displayed his objects. Since the artist has seemingly situated his still life in a courtyard or on a terrace, the lighting is bright, not dissimilar from that of, for instance, his outdoor still life now in St. Petersburg (cat. no. A 190). It is also similar to that of cat. nos. A 195 and 197, with clear indications of the rays of light creating shadows. The bright sky at upper right adds strongly to this open-air atmosphere.

Two still lifes with lobsters, and related works

A 225

AU 5 After J.Dz. de Heem? Still life with a lobster upon a bottle casket, bears signature ‘J.D.Heem.Inv’, black chalk, 23,9 x 31,3 cm. Albertina, Vienna, inv. no. 8595.

Related in handling and motifs to the Utrecht vertical still life (cat. no. A 199) is an upright still life which features a red-boiled lobster upon a bottle casket (cat. no. A 225). In type, it is somewhat reminiscent of a type of still life that de Heem painted from the mid-1640 until the mid-1650s, be it mostly in a horizontal format, such as cat. nos. A 104 (Private collection), 110 (Kassel), 188 (Sarasota), and 191 (Rotterdam). It would appear that, like the majority of those earlier works, this painting originally had a horizontal format. It appears to have been cut, probably to the right and certainly to the left. Moreover, a drawings exists that copies a very similar composition of a horizontal format, which seems to give an impression of the original design of cat. no. A 225 (Cat. Drawings D R 05, fig. AU 5). The window and drapery seen in the drawing also link the painting to an early example by Abraham Mignon (fig. AU 6). Another painting by Mignon, also in the collection of the Rijksmuseum, also suggests that artist’s familiarity with this or a very similar de Heem still life. Nevertheless, de Heem’s painting is probably of a somewhat later date than the one in Utrecht; the rendering of the oysters is strongly reminiscent of that of cat. nos. A 222 and 226, which will be discussed below and which probably originated in the second half of the 1660s. The handling of the rummer also concurs with that of rummers from the second half of the 1660s.

Probably somewhat later than cat. no. A 225 is an upright composition in the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden (cat. no. A 230), which in recent years has been found to be the only autograph version of this composition. This still life, too, in terms of motifs, is reminiscent of
earlier compositions with lobsters upon a casket, while the addition of a festoon of fruit into the composition had occurred in cat. no. A 186 (Vienna). The overall atmosphere, however, in part due to the dark background, is more solemn than those earlier paintings, and than cat. no. A 225. The high degree of glazing and extremely detailed execution belongs to the most refined from the period.

AU 6 A. Mignon, *Still life with a lobster and a goldfinch*, signed, oil on canvas, 78 x 67 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-A-266.

AU 7 Jan Mortel after Jan Dz. de Heem, *Still life with fruit and a lobster*, signed, oil on canvas, 70,7 x 58,7 cm. Leipzig, Museum der bildenden Künste, inv. no. 1577.

AU 8 After Jan Dz. de Heem, *Still life with a lobster*, oil on canvas, 70 x 59 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-A-139.

The handling of the white grapes is strongly similar to that in cat. no. A 218 (Stockholm), with which it also share an almost identical curved ear of wheat, and the velvet table cloth is related in type to that in cat. nos. A 222 and 224-226. In contrast with other examples, the bottle casket on which the lobster is placed is not covered with blue velvet, but appears to have been made of thin plain wood. It also lacks the usually prominent set of keys. In view of its high finish, it may well be that the Dresden painting was done for an important, well-paying patron. It is interesting to note that two
early copies of good quality exist, one by Jan Mortel, the other anonymous, in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (copies A 230 a and b, figs. AU 7 and 8). Both paintings have long been considered as autograph version by Jan Dz. de Heem. The Leipzig painting, however, particularly after cleaning, reveals Mortel’s somewhat broader hand. It was probably copied already early in Mortel’s career, in any case he had obviously had the opportunity to study de Heem’s characteristic red admiral butterfly by 1688.

AU 9 Probably after Jan Dz. de Heem, Still life with fruit and a lobster, bears signature and date 1667, oil on canvas, 87,5 x 72,5 cm. Brussels, Royal Museums for Fine Arts, inv. no. 3166.

AU 10 Probably after Jan Dz. de Heem, Still life with fruit and a lobster, oil on canvas, 78,7 x 67,3 cm. Location unknown

A still life in Brussels has long been considered as an autograph work by de Heem, in view of its high quality of detail and because of the signature it bears at upper left ‘J.D.De.heem/ f.1667.’ (fig. AU 9). The composition is reminiscent of the painting in Dresden (cat. no. A 230), with the lobster, a lemon and the dish of fruit in the same position and with an identically creased velvet fringed tablecloth. The still life is set before a niche and there is no festoon of fruit like in cat. no. A 230, which makes the composition feel more spacious. The rummer has been placed upon a round, ornamented silver (?) box, virtually identical of the one that appears in cat. no. A 229, to be discussed below. The rummer and the laurel wreath wrapped around it are the same as those in that painting, while the peach on top of the lobster follows the same model as the one in cat. no. A 218 (Stockholm). The overall handling, however, is certainly not that of de Heem himself. It is harder and the modelling is quite stiff. The fact that another version of this composition by yet another hand exists (fig. AU 10), suggests that an original by de Heem may have existed, after which both paintings will be rather early copies. Probably the second version follows de Heem’s original more closely: there is a dark drapery in the background, which makes it feel less empty than the Brussels copy, and there is a bread roll at lower right, similar to those in cat. nos. A 199, 224, 226, 228, and 230. One may wonder whether the date 1667 on the Brussels copy corresponds with that of the lost (or missing) original. This may well be the case, since the group of still lifes in which the composition fits, discussed above and below, can tentatively be dated to (around) the second half of the 1660s.
An unusual still life with a view through a window

Smaller and more intimate, but closely related in style and handling to cat. no. A 199 (Utrecht) is an oblong still life that was lost to fire in Berlin in World War II (cat. no. A 200). The painting itself is only known from a (good) black-and-white photo, but the palette is known from a later copy that appeared on the art market in the 1990s. Moreover, there is a close variant of this painting by Abraham Mignon (fig. AU 11).\textsuperscript{491}

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

AU 11 A. Mignon, Still life with a view through a window, signed, oil on panel, 39 x 61,5 cm. Private collection, Munich.

Both paintings – de Heem’s and Mignon’s – represent a window sill, with a view through a window of which – in the de Heem – the shutters are half open, allowing for a view into a landscape, not unlike De Heem’s earlier landscapes, but with more focus on what appears to be a church in the central background. The window is flanked with a wreath of flowers to the left and one of fruit to the right. The fruit and foliage are closely related in type and handling to the still lifes discussed above, in particular cat. nos. A 197 and 199. The festoon of flowers to the left shares the majority of its blooms with a second garland, this one only of flowers, in private hands (cat. no. A 201). It is rare for de Heem to repeat such a large number of motifs between two paintings. The compositions as well as the arrangements are so different, however, that it takes a while to spot the many similarities.
Of de Heem’s garlands from this period, cat. no. A 201 is the liveliest in composition and the one which gives the strongest impression of three-dimensionality. This is partly due to the fact that de Heem has not under-layered the garland with bunches of grapes here, as he did in cat. no. A 196 and in cat. no. A 207 (Schwerin, to be discussed below), so the peripheral flowers float free in space. Also he has generally left more space between the flowers inside the garland. From this point of view, there is a direct relationship with the smaller still life of flowers in a vase, cat. no. A 198, discussed above.

As already signalled, that bouquet shares its wavy tulip with a bouquet in the National Gallery in Washington DC (cat. no. A 202), with which it shares several motifs: apart from the tulip, a small rose to the left and the marigold in the centre and the brimstone butterfly, as well as the same vase. In its present appearance, the Washington still life looks more compact than catalogue no. A 198, but upon close inspection it becomes clear that several flowers were added to it at a later date. Originally, the space between the umbellifer flower and the white poppy, and the lower arrangements of flowers will have been much less crowded, resulting in more of an accentuated curve for the lower arrangement. Particularly the cluster of blue flowers at upper left were added, between the centre of the bouquet and the umbellifer flower at upper left: hyacinth, auriculas, and hollyhock, as well as the apple blossom to the left. Also added were the carnation at the lower left, just above the table, as well as the rosebud and the row of tiny forget-me-not in front of the vase, neither of which possesses a proper stem. One of the flowers of the hollyhock and the apple blossom were clearly painted on top of some of de Heem’s umbellifer flowers. Interestingly, these additions can be firmly attributed and dated rather accurately: all of the additional flowers can be found virtually identically in a painting by Jan van Huijsum from the second half of the 1710s (figs. AU 12 and 13). 492

The row of forget-me-nots floats in space in the de Heem, but their positioning is identical to that in the van Huijsum, in which they rest upon a peach. Probably an art dealer or collector at that point in time decided that de Heem’s painting had become old-fashioned and needed some modernization. In view of de Heem’s reputation, one might expect, he chose one of the most reputable flower painters of his own time to paint in the additions. This occurred just around the time of publication, 1718 to 1721, of the first edition of Arnold Houbraken’s three volumes De Groote Schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen, in which that author stated in his lemma on Abraham Mignon that that artist’s work would “have increased more and more in price,
had not the delicious brush of miss R. Ruysch and J. van Huijsum approached nature much closer and made such subjects more splendid.\textsuperscript{483}

Before van Huijsum’s additions, de Heem’s painting in Washington (cat. no. A 202) obviously had a more open character, similar to that of cat. no. A 198. The peony poppy at lower right, and particularly the white one in top are closely related in their handling to that in the garland, cat. no. A 201. Like in his little bouquet from 1652, cat. no. A 150, de Heem has added pea pods to his bouquet, both at the foot of the vase and in the centre. A new feature in this painting is the blue-green cabbage leaf at lower left. The character of de Heem’s snowball flowers has evolved since the Dresden vanitas flower still life. In that painting the ball of flowers was clear built up of individual small flowers, here they primarily work as a unity with less individual detail. In cat. no. A 198, a snowball is half hidden behind some other flowers to the right. The fact that it is even less detailed than in the Washington still life is obviously also due to the fact that the painter did not want to give it the prominence of a foreground flower.

The Washington still life, too, is crowded with crawling and flying creatures. An unusual feature is the small lizard aiming for the cross spider at lower left. Even in his out-door still lifes lizards are a rarity. They occur frequently in the still lifes of de Heem’s probable teacher in Utrecht, Balthasar van der Ast, and with Jacob Marrel, who had also worked in Utrecht. The lizard in this painting may be a courtesy to their work. The Washington floral still life is closely related to a slightly smaller example in the Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum in Innsbruck (cat. no. A 203). The two paintings are very similar in style and handling. They share the brown marble table on which the vase has been placed, with a prominent snail on its edge and an ear of wheat hanging in front of it. The reflections and translucence of the vases is also very similar. The construction of the bouquets differ, however. In Washington, the centre of the bouquet consists of a rather wide, horizontal spread of flowers. Above it, dominates the white peony poppy, while a red example at lower right dominates that part of the painting. Instead, in the Innsbruck painting, in the lower half of the bouquet a group of flowers forms an arch around the vase. Starting at the pink rose at lower left, the eye is led up via
a small rosebud, a small yellow rose, and a pair of gentians, to the two prominent roses – one pink, on white – in the centre, and further up to the morning glories and the protruding white-and-red tulip.

To the right of this group of flowers is a cascade starting with a poppy bud and a small orange rose, followed by two stalks of wheat, a large leaf, and the half-open poppy at lower right. Most prominent in the bouquet, however, is the tulip at top left which is in the last stage of its bloom, in contrast to the fresh bloom of the one to the right. The two main groups of flowers are united and clustered by the airy and brightly lit branch of elderflower to the left. While here, too, there is a peony poppy in top, it is a dark one that merely serves as a backdrop for the two tulips. In its looser arrangement, the Innsbruck bouquet is somewhat closer to cat. no. A 198 than to cat. no. A 202 in Washington. The three-dimensionality and layering of the latter two bouquets is more advanced, however. Again, the interweaving of stems, leaves and stalks of wheat provides a strong illusion of depth. Also, de Heem has placed flowers at the back of the bouquet that subtly catch some light and thus provide depth. In the Washington bouquet, there is a peony at the back to the right, which visually pushes the other flowers and leaves forward. In the Innsbruck bouquet, a white-and-purple tulip is half-hidden in a similar position. Its three-dimensionality is not as complex as that of the former two examples, but de Heem again uses the crossing and weaving of stems and stalks and the overlapping of flowers as a successful means to suggest depth.

Around the time of origin of these paintings, de Heem was obviously trying out various arrangements for his floral bouquets. A fairly large painting in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg (cat. no. A 204) offers a somewhat looser variant of the Washington composition: there is a horizontally oriented central group of flowers, but the two pink roses also provide a vertical component in the central arrangement. Like in Washington, a wavy tulip reaches out to the right. It is interesting to note that part of the top layers of the tulips have flaked off, laying bare the local areas of orange-red ground with which de Heem prepared these flowers. There is also a large peony poppy in top of the bouquet, but due to the fact that it is a warm red, rather than white, is does not claim as much attention as in the Washington bouquet. The Hermitage bouquet replaces Washington’s poppy at lower right with a wavy red and cream-white tulip. The handling of the ledge and the vase is again strongly similar to that in Washington and particularly that in Innsbruck, but in cat. no. A 204 there is a faint indication of a niche in which the vase is standing.
A long stalk of grass rising up to the right, a stalk of wheat to the left and the tall stem of the peony poppy in the centre provide strong vertical accents to the bouquet, but at the same time, the central group of flowers has a distinct curve from lower left to centre right.

The same is true for a flower painting in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge (cat. no. A 205). In it, de Heem has placed some smaller flowers that catch light at the back of the bouquet, but no larger, half-hidden ones like the peony in Washington or the tulip in Innsbruck. Like the Innsbruck painting (cat. no. A 203), there is a strong diagonal from lower left to upper right. Of this group of flower paintings, however, the Cambridge bouquet makes the most flamboyant impression. This is due to the fact that brightly lit flowers stick out of the centre of the bouquet in almost every direction, which nearly gives the viewer the sensation of looking at exploding fireworks. Even the sparkle of the sharply pointed edges of the thistle leaf and the radiant blossom of the honeysuckle, both at lower right, add to that effect. Unusually, de Heem has placed a separate tulip on the ledge, beside the vase at lower left, pushing forward into space, and as such also adding to the centrifugal effect. The tulip at upper right in the Cambridge bouquet is virtually identical to the one at lower right in the Hermitage bouquet (cat. no. A 204) and the peony poppy at the top is very similar to the one in that painting. The treatment of the various flowers is also closely related to the ones in the other bouquets discussed above. There are tulips with a ‘waxy’ appearance (at upper left) as well as ‘papery’ examples (at lower right), the white rose in the centre is rather similar to those in cat nos. A 204 and A 205, and the snowball is again closer to that in the large Dresden bouquet (cat. no. A 194). Many of the other flowers are also shared – not identically but interpreted in the same way – between these various bouquets: marigold, blue irises, morning glory, anemone, pansy, and cornflower, among others. It would appear that the artist studied or at least interpreted many of them anew for each bouquet, which is another sign de Heem’s dedication to the high quality of his work. Occasionally de Heem introduced new flowers in his repertoire. The African marigold in the Cambridge bouquet, below the snowball, had only appeared in the privately owned garland, cat. no. A 201.

To study the flowers he depicted, Jan Davidsz. de Heem must have had access to botanic gardens and collections. Perhaps this concerned private gardens, but he may also have been a
regular visitor of the botanic garden of Utrecht University, which had been founded in 1639, particularly for the study of medical herbs, and which had published a catalogue of 678 types, variants and cultivars. Like most of these bouquets, the Cambridge painting also hosts many creatures. Next to de Heem’s favourite red admiral and brimstone butterflies, there is a peacock butterfly, at lower right, and there are two moths and two caterpillars. De Heem has also included various other flying insects, among them a dragonfly and a bee. A large cross spider hangs between the top flowers. At the lower right, a large cricket is crawling onto the table, and a grasshopper is looking at us from the stem of a tulip at upper right. The large cricket is a regular guest in de Heem’s flower paintings, it can also be found in cat. no. A 204, among others.

The same two animals also appear in cat. no. A 206, in the collection of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp, which is the largest of the group of four garlands of mainly flowers that de Heem painted in the 1660s. In view of the similarities of motifs and handling with cat. nos. A 202, A 205 and particularly and A 204, it must have originated around the same time as those flower pieces. There is also some similarity in handling with cat. nos. A 193 and 194, but on the whole, this garland clearly represents a further development in de Heem’s work and as such has more sophistication, both in execution and in composition. While both the central cluster of flowers and the composition as a whole are more compact than those of cat. nos. A 204 and 205, here too, there is certain centrifugal aspect to the arrangement.

This painting is the first and only by de Heem to include a cultivar auricula, at upper left. Its handling shows substantial difference with the one added to cat. no. A 202 by Jan van Huijsum.
The fourth and smallest of the four garlands, cat. no. A 207, in Schwerin, in several ways combines characteristics of the other three examples. Like in cat. no. A 196, the flowers have been arranged on top of some bunches of grapes and other small fruit, it has a similar looseness of arrangement as cat. no. A 201, while the choice of flowers has the most similarities with cat. no. A 206. The large tulip at upper centre is the same one as in cat. no. A 194 and the pink rose is a close variant of the one in the Cambridge bouquet (cat. no. A 205).

In the same period, roughly the first half of the 1660s, de Heem painted one more garland, as far as we know now, this one mainly of fruit, and larger than any of the flower garlands (cat. no. A 208, in the Mauritshuis, The Hague). Its construction, however, is similar to that of the floral garlands and bouquets: de Heem is layering his motifs, successfully suggesting depth, also by interweaving branches and stalks of wheat. Other than in the flower garlands, he barely uses difference in lighting to suggest depth, but places the various fruits and flowers behind and in front of each other in bright light. Only some bunches of grapes at lower right are pushed back by a lack or direct light. This painting, too, is enlivened by some butterflies and caterpillars as well as a few other flying and creeping creatures. The handling of the fruit, as well as the palette, are strongly reminiscent of cat. nos. A 199, and 200, as well as A 197; the branch of peach leaves to the left is virtually identical to that in the latter painting.

The purpose of de Heem’s garlands is uncertain. The size of cat. no. A 208 in the Mauritshuis suggests that it may have been conceived as an overdoor decoration. This seems to be confirmed by the composition, which works best from a low viewpoint: most of the fruit is shown slightly from below. In contrast, however, its meticulous attention to detail invites inspection up close, which is not possible when the painting is hanging high up. Moreover, this will have been an expensive painting, so if it was indeed conceived as an overdoor, it was probably destined for a prestigious cabinet. The flower garlands, too, are best viewed from a relatively low standpoint, but particularly for the smaller examples it is difficult to imagine that they were hung as high as over a door. They may, however, have hung in the upper row in a cabinet of fine paintings. The flower paintings were clearly intended to be hung at sight height, judging from the perspective of the ledges, and the fine and numerous details invite close inspection and probably conversation among viewers.

With these paintings, de Heem clearly connects with the vogue for finely detailed images in Holland at the time. The impact of fine painters in other genres, such as Gerard Dou and Frans van Mieris (1635-1681), was clearly felt on the market and de Heem’s art blends well with it. It would seem that after his move back north, his handling became even more refined than during the first half of the 1650s in Antwerp.

Abraham Mignon

The group of still lifes discussed in the previous paragraphs clearly had an enormous impact on Abraham Mignon, who joined de Heem’s studio probably in 1664. Mignon was baptised in Frankfurt am Main on 21 June 1640, the son of French reformed parents, who entrusted him as a pupil to Jacob Marrel, probably shortly after the latter’s move back from Utrecht to Frankfurt in 1650. According to Houbraken, Mignon stayed with Marrel for two times seven years, until his 24th year, which indeed squares with an apprenticeship starting in 1650.494 In the fourteen years of Marrel’s guidance, we may expect, Mignon must have become an accomplished and fully trained artist. He himself is believed to have given drawing and
painting lessons to Marrel’s step-daughter, Maria Sibylla Merian (1647-1717). In 1664, Marrel took Mignon to Utrecht on a business trip – next to being a still-life painter, he was also active as an art dealer and tulip dealer – and left him in the care of Jan Davidsz. de Heem. Consequently, when Mignon entered de Heem’s studio he was far from a novice. Nevertheless, no work by the artist can be pointed out that does not fully breathe the impact of de Heem’s work from the Utrecht years. One would expect to be able to find early paintings by Mignon that show a distinct inspiration by Marrel, but this is not the case. Even if he was copying or imitating de Heem already in Frankfurt, his known paintings only show an impact of de Heem’s Utrecht works and not of any earlier work that Marrel could or would have shown his pupil.

It is not easy to establish a chronology for Mignon’s work, who – like de Heem after 1655 – did not date his still lifes. Kraemer-Noble (2007) observed correctly that Mignon’s handling became harder and sharper and that he used fewer glazes later on in his career, particularly after de Heem had left the Utrecht studio in 1672. It would be logical to assume that when de Heem took Mignon on as a pupil, he guided and assisted him and, particularly, showed him how to improve his verisimilitude by applying glazes and fine finish. There are several paintings that would seem to qualify as early works by Mignon which appear to have come into existence in close collaboration with de Heem. That many of those early works belong to Mignon’s most accomplished efforts may be explained from the fact that he was already a fully trained painter with ample technical skills, which he only had to adapt to de Heem’s imagery, while de Heem’s assistance concerning composition and finish will also have had a significant effect on the final result. A festoon of fruit and flowers in Dresden (fig. AU 14) may indeed well be one of Mignon’s earliest efforts, as Kraemer-Noble suggested. The composition, in this case, is not a characteristic composition for de Heem, by whom we know only one festoon, from 1648 (cat. no. A 114), but there is a direct relationship with the choice of motifs in De Heem’s still lifes, flower paintings, and garlands from the late 1650s and first half of the 1660s discussed above. The white rose, the ants, the burst-open chestnut, the white grapes and the stalk of wheat with its elegantly curved leaf, all echo de Heem’s work and, particularly in the glazing of the grapes, suggest his close guidance, if not actual assistance. An unsigned still life in the collection of the Prince of Liechtenstein (fig. AU 15) and another with an apocryphal monogram AM (fig. AU 16) are closely related as well. Of both, the composition is more elegant and flowing, and less sturdy than Mignon’s tend to be, and their execution is more refined. Upon close comparison, in their overall execution, de Heem’s hand cannot be recognized in them, but Mignon’s can. These works are exemplary of how Mignon’s style and handling must have grown out of his direct adaptations of de Heem’s handling and motifs, under close guidance and perhaps some assistance. Nevertheless, only with a talent like Mignon’s is this possible. The comparison with Cornelis de Heem forces itself upon us here. Cornelis had a similar great talent and his oeuvre shows a similar development as Mignon’s: once fully trained and when still in close contact with his father, during the mid-1650s, he produced many of his most accomplished works and after Jan Davidsz. de Heem had left the Antwerp studio, Cornelis’ work soon became less refined. Due to the fact that he was trained by his father, however, Cornelis’ early development must have differed from Mignon’s, who only came under de Heem’s guidance as a fully trained artist.
Several other of Mignon’s works can be assigned to this early period, which must be situated around 1665. His garland in Copenhagen (fig. AU 17) is clearly related to de Heem’s in Antwerp (cat. no. A 206). Its execution is already closer to Mignon’s characteristic relatively hard and sharp handling than, for instance, the painting in Dresden (fig. AU 14 above), but still more refined and breathing de Heem’s atmosphere. Three still lifes in the Rijksmuseum and one in Frankfurt am Main belong to the same stage of development (figs. AU 6, 18, and 19). The highly detailed vine leaves in all three refer to those in cat. no. A 197 in particular, as do the white and black grapes. Several motifs in the Frankfurt painting are connected with the painting in fig. AU 19, such as the branch of blackberries and Venetian-style covered glass, which also appears in cat. no. A 197. The peach in the upright Rijksmuseum painting (fig. AU 6, above) is the same one as in the painting in fig. AU 16. Mignon obviously closely studied De Heem’s technique in rendering reflections in glass. The reflections in the rummers in the Rijksmuseum paintings barely differ from those in de Heem’s in cat. no. A 195 in Oslo, inclusive of the tree outside the window, reflected upside-down in the white wine. The silver-gilt cup and cover in both Rijksmuseum paintings is the same as in cat. no. A 199, and the dark-grey draperies in those painting were clearly inspired by de Heem’s in that painting.
In all three, Mignon also included the knife with a chequered handle which de Heem portrayed in cat. no. A 199. Mignon’s preference for the inclusion of numerous insects, of snails, and of stalks of wheat are also obviously fully indebted to de Heem. A painting in Kassel would appear to be a next step in Mignon’s development (fig. AU 20). It is still strongly related in its motifs and refined handling to the still lifes mentioned above, but its composition is an individual invention which does not derive from immediate examples by de Heem.

Abraham Mignon’s flower paintings would appear to belong to a later development than the still lifes mentioned above. His choice of flowers and other motifs was certainly strongly inspired by de Heem, but the vast majority of his flower paintings was executed in his individually developed, sharper, more direct manner and with fewer glazes than de Heem would apply. Mignon’s lighting is generally harsher, his arrangements tend to be more dense,
and his lines are less elegant than de Heem’s. The festoon of fruit and flowers in Dresden (fig. AU 9) and the garland in Copenhagen (fig. AU 17) are more closely connected with de Heem’s flowers than any of Mignon’s still lifes of flower vases.

A floral still life in the Louvre, Paris, must be one of his earliest efforts (fig. AU 21). The dependence on de Heem is undisputable, but the composition lacks the elegance and flow of those by de Heem. Despite Mignon’s interweaving of stems and stalks in de Heem’s manner, he does not attain the same depth and elegance. Many details, however, particularly of the smaller flowers and of the vase, are worthy of de Heem’s examples. A larger flower painting, again in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (fig. AU 22), repeats the carnation and the snowball from the Louvre painting. It combines them with several flowers from the Copenhagen garland: the red poppy, the blue iris – which may derive from the same study as the one in de Heem’s painting, cat. no. A 205 in Cambridge – and close variants of the white and yellow roses and of the peony. The crossing-over of tulip stems would appear to have been inspired by de Heem’s tulips in cat. no. A 205. This bouquet clearly represents a later development in Mignon’s work. Here, he masters the liveliness of the composition much more, as well as the suggestion of depth by interweaving and overlapping. Also, he has further developed his rather hard, graphically precise manner of rendering, with a palette of strong, saturated colours. Moreover, the fact that this painting shares a tulip with a later de Heem floral still life, cat. no. A 218 in Stockholm, confirms its somewhat later date.

**Maria van Oosterwijck**

From Houbraken, we know that the painter of flowers and still life, Maria van Oosterwijck (1630-1693), also took lessons from Jan Davidsz. de Heem. In contrast with Mignon, however, her oeuvre does no show an immediate dependence on de Heem’s examples. Nevertheless, his tuition had a lasting effect on her work. A proper analysis of the interaction between de Heem and van Oosterwijck is impeded by the fact that no early dated works by

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**AU 21 A. Mignon, Still life of flowers in a vase, signed, oil on panel, 48 x 42 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. 1555.**

**AU 22 A. Mignon, Still life of flowers with a watch, signed, oil on canvas, 75 x 60 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-A-268.**
Maria are known. Her earliest known dated painting is a vanitas still life from 1668, which is a mature and fully accomplished work.\textsuperscript{507} By that time, Maria van Oosterwijck was working in Amsterdam, where she had moved in mid-1666. Considering the fact that Maria was already 30 years old when she came to Utrecht in 1660, and that she had been drawing since she was very young, her draughtsmanship must have been quite accomplished by that time. She may not have worked in oils before, however. The composition and handling of an (unsigned) still life of flowers in a vase (fig. AU 23) are still slightly naïve, but at the same time show many characteristics of her later work.\textsuperscript{508}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{figs/au23.png}
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{figs/au24.png}
\caption{AU 23 M. van Oosterwijck, \textit{Flowers in a glass vase}, signed, oil on panel, 40,2 x 30,5 cm. Present location unknown. AU 24 M. van Oosterwijck, \textit{Festoon of flowers and fruit}, signed, oil on panel, 40 x 32,5 cm. Present location unknown.}
\end{figure}

The painting is reminiscent of cat. nos. A 192, 193 and 194, at least to some degree, and this may well be an early work produced under de Heem’s guidance. A festoon of flowers and fruit hanging from a blue ribbon in a niche (fig. AU 24), is a much more accomplished work.\textsuperscript{509} Among Maria van Oosterwijck’s paintings, it is probably the most closely related to de Heem’s. Even though it is an original composition rather than an imitation, it breathes the atmosphere of floral paintings such as cat. nos. A 204 and 205 and garlands such as cat. nos. A 206 and 207. The choice of motifs – not only the flowers and fruit, but also the red admiral butterfly, the grasshopper and the cross spider, as well as the stalk of wheat weaving through – the lighting and the finish, are all clearly indebted to de Heem. Also, there is a relation, also for other festoons by her hand, with Mignon’s examples such as the one in Dresden (fig. AU 14).

After Maria van Oosterwijck moved to Amsterdam, she must have stayed in contact with her teacher or at least kept up with his developments, since later still lifes, both of flowers and of other subjects, often show some degree of inspiration from de Heem. A still life of a rummer, a silver-gilt cup and fruit, now in Dresden (fig. AU 25) shows the same silver-gilt cup-and-cover as in cat. nos. A 199 and 209, among others, and as in various of Mignon’s still lifes (fig. AU 6 and 18), as well as the window with a tassel in front that occurs with both de Heem and Mignon, which would suggest that it originated during her Utrecht sojourn, but the handling suggests a later date of execution.\textsuperscript{510}
Circa 1665 to 1672

A still life of fruit – mainly grapes – a silver-gilt cup, and wine glasses (cat. no. A 209), which was acquired by The Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, in 2006, in many ways fits in well with de Heem’s work from the mid-1660s, but also it is an unusual composition. Virtually the same silver-gilt cup as in cat. no. A 199, its cover beside it, stands just off-centre in the picture plane. The attention of the viewer, however, is drawn first and foremost to a cascade of white grapes hanging down from a blue ribbon attached to the right edge of the stone niche in which this still life is presented. The bunches of grapes and a corn cob are tied together with a blue ribbon and are interwoven with several stalks of wheat that provide liveliness and that accentuate the flow of the cascade. The liveliness is also enhanced by the variety of reflections of the light on the vine leaves that stand out in various directions and under various angles. Strong light is also caught by a white butterfly sitting on a vine leaf at lower right and on a peach beside it. The peach has a similar colour pattern as the ones on cat. nos. A 197 and 199. The ledge is covered with a
velvet green, gold-fringed tablecloth, reminiscent of the one in cat. no. A 199, and which also appears similarly in several of Mignon’s still lifes. To the left of the silver-gilt cup is a bunch of reddish black grapes that was clearly modelled upon the same study as the bunch in cat. no. A197. Particularly the grapes to the right are crowded with creatures. There are two butterflies, several caterpillars, a maybug, a bee, a large cricket, on the ledge there is a snail, and at top centre a large dragonfly has alighted on a vine leaf. At the back of the niche there are two wine glasses and a small melon. One might wonder whether de Heem endowed this painting with a specific iconography that eludes a modern viewer, but most of all it appears to be a celebration of plenty and, via the grapes and glasses, probably of the wine. Through the connection with the various still lifes mentioned above, a date around 1665 for this painting would appear to be appropriate.

Difficult to date because of its exceptional subject and exceptionally high degree of finish is a forest-floor painting in Dresden (cat. no. A 210). To some degree this painting represents a further development after de Heem’s outdoor still lifes in Munich (cat. nos. A 153 and 176 [with its variant A 177]) and St. Petersburg (cat. no. A 190), but here he has opted for a vertical format and introduced several new motifs.

This type of still life is often associated with the work of Otto Marseus van Schrieck (1619/20-1673), who is well-known for his forest floor paintings, in which reptiles, amphibians, thistles, mushrooms and butterflies are the main motifs. Marseus had spent almost a decade in Italy – Rome and Florence – where he had developed his characteristic motifs and style, and had returned to Holland and settled in Amsterdam in 1657. Jan Davidsz. de Heem had most probably seen examples of his work on the market or in collections, and it may haveInspired him directly or indirectly in the making of cat. no. A 210. In contrast, however, Marseus’ paintings are rather dark, even when they include a background view of a landscape, and his palette consists mainly of brown hues and rather cool greens, with occasional colourful accents in the form of flowers, plants with red leaves, or butterflies. The butterflies in the majority of Marseus’ paintings originally contained the pigments of real butterfly wings, pressed onto the wet paint.511 Those have mostly disappeared early on, leaving flat, white, wing-shaped areas, that have often been repainted in proper butterfly patterns by later
restorers. Jan Davidsz. de Heem was an eager painter of butterflies himself, and may well have opposed to sticking butterfly wings onto his paintings, if only in view of their quality. While stimulated in some way by Otto Marseus van Schrieck’s work, with cat. no. A 210 de Heem has created a painting with an entirely different ambience. Some motifs connect it with Marseus’ examples, such as the lizard, the frog, the snails, and the thistle, but unlike Marseus’ paintings, the image does not suggest an existing biotope that the viewer has chanced upon. De Heem’s is a carefully constructed still life of fruit, which is set inside a ruin, rather than in a forest. The central cluster of fruit is reminiscent of that in the painting in St. Petersburg (cat. no. A 190), smaller fruit is gathered around a melon, this one only marginally cut open. The treatment of the fruit is softer than in the paintings discussed above, for instance cat. no. A 209, and extremely detailed. This painting is among the most refined in execution in de Heem’s oeuvre. Here, de Heem has also employed his stalks of wheat to suggest depth: one lies across the melon and sticks forward, another unnaturally tall one encircles the still life of fruit to the right with an elegant curve. Its front end separates a dead bird from its nest. Next to the creatures already found in the garlands and flower paintings discussed above, such as ants, grasshoppers, bees, cross spiders, caterpillars, a dragonfly, and the ‘signature’ red admiral and brimstone butterflies, de Heem has introduced maybugs and a stag beetle.512 Also, to the lower left, there is a mouse, and a goldfinch is about to fly off a branch at top centre, while a dead goldfinch lies on its back at front right, beside its meticulously rendered nest, which holds two eggs and which is infiltrated by a colony of ants. One egg has fallen out of the nest and lies freshly broken beside it. De Heem seems to suggest that a predator has tried to pillage the nest, killing the bird, and now has fled. An interesting motif is the scorpion, just above the mouse. It is also found in cat. no. A 223, to be discussed below. Diekamp (2001) has found that the animal in this form does not exist, but that it was derived from a Hoefnagel print.513 Another new motif is the dead tree under which the still life is presented. The entire painting is a juxtaposition of fertility and decay: the ripe fruit, almost without blemishes, the flowers and the fresh branch of acorns, against the dilapidated ruin, the withered tree and the dead bird and the broken egg. This painting may well have been the main incentive for a large group of such images painted by Abraham Mignon, probably starting in the second half of the 1660s. He virtually copied de Heem’s setting in the vault of a ruin in several examples.514 Other motifs from this painting also occur similarly in Mignon’s interpretations, such as the gold finch, the birds’ nest with eggs, the large burdock leaf, as well as extremely tall stalks of wheat passing through the composition. Within de Heem’s oeuvre, the Dresden painting (cat. no. A 210) is rather unique, but he would paint some related subjects later on in his career which will be dealt with later (cat. nos. A 232, 258 and 259).
A flower painting in a private collection (cat. no. A 211) is executed in a similar subtle and refined handling as cat. no. A 210. Its composition is less curvy and more modest than, for instance, cat. nos. A 204 and 205, but also in this composition a white rose takes up the central position around which the bouquet has been arranged.515 This still life does, however, show de Heem’s progress in his continuous search for the most ideal rendering of the various types of flowers. More than in earlier bouquets, he makes an attempt here to adopt his handling of each individual flower to its proper texture: the velvety surface of the morning glory, slightly different textures for all three different roses, a thicker substance for the larger tulip on top, a thinner handling of the almost withering one to the right, and a rather fuzzy surface for the budding poppy at lower right. De Heem has also refined his rendering of the vase, the reflections on it and the stems in it. He no longer applies the radiant copper green, which occurs in, for instance, cat. no. A 198, but the vase has become almost colourless, allowing for a detailed rendering of the various stems and the water inside it. The bouquet itself is less crowded with creatures than most of the previous examples. Apart from de Heem’s usual red admiral butterfly, there are some ants on the yellow rose, a caterpillar and an ichneumon wasp on top of the central tulip. Like in cat. no A 194, the artist has introduced a blossoming white nettle in this bouquet, at upper right. As so often in de Heem’s bouquets, there is a consistent combination of cultivars and field species.

A bouquet in a private collection in Canada (cat. no A 212), untypically painted on copper, shows numerous similarities with the previous work in type and composition. In general, however, the paint of the flowers is slightly more saturated, perhaps due to the difference in support.516 The treatment of the vase is highly similar, and the reflection of the window is even more detailed than in cat. no. A 211. In contrast with most of de Heem’s globular vases, this vase has a foot which, perhaps as a result of this addition, stand at the very front of the ledge, even slightly protruding over it. On the whole, this painting, too, abounds in detail, and other than cat. no A 211, it is again crowded with animal life. There are five different butterflies and moths, of which the magpie moth, hanging from the lower side of the peony poppy, makes its only appearance in a de Heem still life here. Although less than in some earlier examples, de Heem also uses stems and stalks bending and intertwining. Extremely effective is the unnaturally long stem of the pansy draped in front of the vase. Like in cat. nos. A 202, 204 and 205, as well as in several subsequent examples, a large peony poppy crowns the bouquet.

Compositions such as this one clearly must have stimulated Abraham Mignon to produce similar work that can be dated to the second half of the 1660s. The earliest is probably a painting in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (fig. AU 26).517 It is still rather refined in its execution, but Mignon’s composition is not entirely balanced, with an uneasy void under the peony poppy and the rather distracting, too brightly lit rose at the bottom. The flowers were not copied after de Heem’s, but they were certainly painted with intimate knowledge of the master’s examples, such as the peony poppy, the columbine, the white rose and the carnation. Mignon’s snails also impersonate de Heem’s and his vase could not have been painted without the example of de Heem’s vases from this group. Several of the flowers in the Oxford bouquet reappear in what is arguably Mignon’s best and most impressive painting, a still life of flowers with vanitas symbols (fig. AU 27).518 That work has a fully convincing and balanced composition and the execution is of an extremely high level of quality. While for the majority of the flowers it betrays Mignon’s tendency to a rather sharp and graphic finish, it also contains many de Heem-like refinements and glazes. Comparing de Heem’s peony poppies in cat. nos. A 204, 205 and 212 with Mignon’s handling of the latter, this is only marginally harder in execution. Of the same high level of execution is a bouquet by Mignon in the Louvre, Paris,
which repeats or shares several of the flowers in fig. AU 27 almost verbatim, and which must have been done around the same time during the second half of the 1660s.\textsuperscript{519} Even if Jan Davidsz. de Heem did not assist Mignon in the execution of these paintings, they show how difficult the distinction between the works of the two artist from the second half of the 1660s can be.

Around the same time, de Heem combined several flowers from cat. nos. A 211 and particularly A 212 into an oblong garland (cat. no. A 213 ), which unfortunately is not very well preserved. From cat. no. A 211, this painting borrows the slender tulip and probably one of the morning glories, from cat. no. A 212, the pink rose to the right and the anemone, the rosehips, the white butterfly, the bent poppy bud, and the Virginia spiderwort.

The oblong garland also borrows several motifs from a third, smaller flower painting, cat. no. A 214, namely all three roses, and a rose bud, the orange tip butterfly, and the cluster of rose leaves to the left, as well as the columbine, which in its turn is very similar to the one in cat. no. 022, but modelled slightly differently. At lower left, cat. no. A 214 includes a red anemone which is painted rather flatly for a de Heem flower. One may wonder whether this anemone was perhaps executed by Abraham Mignon, but it may just as well be that de Heem did not apply its final finish for some reason or

\footnotesize

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Image 71x467 to 180x612

Image 188x467 to 361x694

Image 71x190 to 442x332

Image 289x52

Image 71x761

Image 457x457

Image 444x444

Image 399x399

Image 368x368

Image 352x352

Image 181x151

Image 136x136

Image 120x120

Image 89x74

Image 74x74

Image 236
other. Interestingly, the same anemone can be found in at least two still lifes by Mignon, an early festoon (fig. AU 17 above) and a still life of a vase of flowers (fig. AU 28) which must also be a relatively early work.  

![Image of flowers](image1)

![Image of flowers](image2)

A 214
AU 28 A. Mignon, Flowers in a glass vase, signed, oil on panel, 46.7 x 35.9 cm. Present location unknown.

The execution of the anemone in the latter work is more detailed and refined than in cat. no. 024, and it is most likely the prime appearance of this flower. Nevertheless, it reappears in a de Heem two flower piece from the first half of the 1670s, cat. nos. A 247 and 253, only slightly more glazed (cf fig. AU 28). This would mean that, although Mignon had used it, de Heem retained the study for it and took it with him when he moved back to Antwerp. Other motifs in the same Mignon bouquet (fig. AU 28) – the tulip, the blossom below it as well as the vase and the stalk of wheat hanging before it – suggest the hand of de Heem in their refined execution and multiple glazing, while the treatment of other motifs, such as the second anemone, the pink roses and their buds, and the marigold clearly betray Mignon’s hand. This is one of the few examples in Mignon’s oeuvre where the impression arises that de Heem has actually painted or finished part of the painting. The same tulip appears in several other Mignon compositions, but never with the same extensive, soft glazing, as well as in a somewhat later de Heem (cat. no. A 242).

A relatively small still life of flowers in a vase, positioned in a stepped niche and with some fruit at the foot of the vase (cat. no. A 215) shows similarities to cat. no. A 214 and to the previous work, particularly in the form and placement of the tulip. It is more modest in character and less elegant than cat. no. A 214. It is one of the smallest paintings from this period by de Heem. The sides of the niche allow for space around the bouquet, but inside it, the composition is rather crowded, with a dominant horizontal band of roses in the centre and a cluster of fruit – an apricot, red currants and blackberries – at the foot of the vase, numerous smaller flowers filling up the empty spaces, and three stalks of wheat curving out of the bouquet. Glazing and fine details are somewhat less proficient in this picture, which suggests that it was painted for the free market, rather than on commission for a major collector.

A small still life of fruit, oysters and a Venetian-style wine glass (cat. no. A 216), in the National Gallery in London, is arranged on a similar stepped ledge, but there is no niche behind. While cat. nos. A 215 and 216 have almost the same height and show the same ledge, must have originated around the same time, and also probably both have a relatively early French provenance, it is unlikely that they were painted as pendants. There is no evidence that cat. no. A 216 ever included a niche, or that it was reduced at the sides. Moreover, a drawing exists in the Staatliche
Grafische Sammlung in Munich (cat. Drawings A01) that appears to be a preparatory study for the composition of the National Gallery painting.

In the painting, the artist has changed some details, for instance the shape of the morning glory in the centre and details and the position of the orange. Interestingly, in the drawing he included several butterflies around the still life which were not executed in the painting. Otherwise the composition is identical to that of the painting – not wider and without a niche. As discussed in the previous chapter, there are no signed or securely documented drawings by Jan Davidsz. de Heem. Because of the fact that cat. no. D 01 is directly related to cat. no. A 216, and is much more likely a study for that painting than a copy of it, it seems reasonable to accept the traditional attribution of it to de Heem. The drawing’s technique is relatively simple. It has been rather loosely sketched with
black chalk, heightened with white. It may well be that the heightening and some strengthening in black were done by a later hand.

Oysters also play a prominent role, next to a covered glass chalice of white wine and an orange with its leaf, in an upright still life that was on the art market in 1987, cat. no. A 217. Other motifs, such as the snails, blackberries and chestnut, are recurring features during this period. The treatment of details is again very similar to that in cat. no. A 216 as well as to several horizontal still lifes of this period that will be discussed below.

Here, too, de Heem has draped a pansy in front of the cuppa of the glass. The rather soft use of light is also similar to cat. no. A 216, but the painting was covered with a discoloured varnish and rather dark when last photographed, which will influence its known appearance.

This and cat. no. A 215 are the first of a series of still-life paintings by Jan Davidsz. de Heem signed ‘J.D.De Heem R’. Until the present day, the suffix ‘R’ remains unexplained. During the seventeenth century, most painters signed their works with their names, followed by an ‘f’ for the Latin ‘fecit’ (made this), or wrote ‘fecit’ in full. So, consistently, did de Heem, at least until his departure from Antwerp sometime after 1655. Signatures with the addition ‘f’ also occur regularly after this time, however, so the ‘R’ is not a permanent substitute for the ‘f’. Unconvincing explanations range from ‘Ridder’, suggesting that the artist had been knighted, which was not the case, to variants of ‘retouched’, suggesting that paintings signed in this manner were (partly) executed by pupils, but finished by de Heem. None of these suggestions seem to make any proper sense, however, since the sixteen to eighteen known works signed in this manner (in some, the addition is not fully distinct) generally belong to the artist’s most successful, detailed and elaborate pieces. All of them were clearly painted after his return to Utrecht after 1655, and probably only after circa 1665. Also after moving back to Antwerp again in 1672, however, de Heem occasionally added the ‘R’, so it is also not specifically related to his Utrecht years. It would appear to be most logical that the ‘R’ stands for a term similar to ‘fecit’, and not for an addition to the artists name, such as ‘Ridder’, the name of a town, or even the family name of his wife, Ruckers. No other painter, to my knowledge, ever used this suffix, however. It is interesting to note that on documents, starting in the late 1650s, de Heem ends his signature with a lower cast r. This is also the case with the signature on cat. no. A 261.

Cornelis de Heem

When Jan Davidsz. de Heem settled in Utrecht sometime in the late 1650s, his son Cornelis de Heem appears to have established his own business in Antwerp. His registration with the
Antwerp guild as an independent master in 1660/61 is without doubt the result of his father’s permanent absence. Contrary to his father, he still occasionally dated his still lifes, even up to 1690. It is clear that until 1658 he produced work of excellent quality (compare, for instance fig. A 69, 72 and 73), after which, generally, the complexity and finish of his work declined, apart from some exceptions that may have been the result of an important commission. It would appear that Cornelis’ relative decline in quality concurs with his father’s absence. His own clientele will generally have been less demanding than his father’s and he may well have aimed for quicker, cheaper production for a lower segment of the market.

In 1667, Cornelis also undertook the move to the northern Netherlands. According to a statement concerning debts by Cornelis that Jan Davidsz. de Heem had notarized in March of 1669, Cornelis and his family lived with his father in Utrecht from mid-June until 4th December 1667.525 Unfortunately, no dated work by Cornelis from 1667 or thereabouts is known, so any immediate connection with his father’s work, and vice versa, is not evident. Until 1690, Cornelis remained in the Northern Netherlands, Living (perhaps) in Amsterdam, in IJsselstein and, from 1676 to 1690, in The Hague, after which he moved back to Antwerp. It is likely, that, in any case until his father’s return to Antwerp, there was a regular contact between the two, and perhaps an exchange of ideas. Cornelis’ choice of motifs and subjects is related to that of Jan Davidsz.’s but there is no question of immediate copying or imitation. The still lifes of Cornelis are clearly recognizable as his, even though some have been passed as works of his father after the signature had been altered (for instance fig. AU 30, painted c. 1660). Two dated examples from 1665 and 1671 demonstrate the relation to, but at the same time, independence of the work of Jan Davidsz. de Heem (figs. AU 31 and 32).

![Still life with a lobster, signed (initial changed to J.D.), oil on copper, 63 x 49,5 cm. Zürich, Kunsthaus, Stiftung B. & D. Koetser.](AU 30)

![Still life of fruit and oysters, signed and dated 1665, oil on canvas, 55,5 x 40 cm. Present location unknown](AU 31)

![Still life of fruit, signed and dated 1671, oil on canvas, 66 x 54 cm. Brussels, Royal Museums for Fine Art of Belgium, inv. no. 1914](AU 32)

In 1682, in an inventory of the collection of Diego Duarte (1612-1691) from Antwerp, a painting by Jan Davidsz. de Heem was described as “A very curious pot of flowers, fruit and other niceties, being the four elements, highly detailed.” Most likely, this description concerns a painting now in the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm (cat. no. A 218).526
In it, an arrangement of fruit and oysters is combined with a vase of flowers, and indeed all four elements are present: Earth (fruit and flowers, the snail), Water (in the vase, dew drops and via the oysters), Air (butterflies, flying insects) and Fire (a smouldering taper, and the glass vase is a product of fire). Diego Duarte was born in Antwerp, the son of a Christian diamond and art dealer of Jewish descent, Gaspar Duarte, who was befriended with Constantijn Huygens, among others. Gaspar was born in 1584 in Antwerp. He later became the consul of Portugal there. In 1635, Diego was appointed "jeweller in ordinary" by Charles I of England, but he returned to Antwerp in 1642. He received a part of the art collection of his father on the latter’s death in 1653, and continued collecting throughout his life. Part of his collection was sold in Amsterdam in 1682.

The house of the Duarte family in Antwerp was called the Antwerp Parnassus, a meeting place for intellectuals, where they enjoyed art and music. Prince William III repeatedly stayed at the house between 1674 and 1678, which suggest Orangist sympathies on the part of Duarte. Jan Davidsz. de Heem must have been well acquainted with this family of art lovers, even if only through his wife’s musical family. Diego’s brother Gaspar Duarte the Younger was an art collector as well, and his sister Leonora was a composer. Apart from the still life of flowers and fruit mentioned above, of which the value was estimated at 350 Guilders, Duarte also owned a still life of fruit by de Heem, “A piece of fruit, very curious” estimated at 150 Guilders. Duarte’s Dutch connections and the fact that part of his collection was sold in Amsterdam suggest that he may well have bought or commissioned his paintings directly from de Heem in Utrecht, although the fruit piece might have been an earlier work that had come from his father’s collection.

It is interesting to note that in 1682 the painting was catalogued in full as by “Den Ouden Joannes de Heem”, while upon close inspection not all the flowers can be attributed to de Heem convincingly. It would appear that Abraham Mignon did collaborate on the painting. The lower half of this still life can be appreciated as entirely by de Heem. The quality, flow and finish are fully characteristic and up to his standard. While a red-and-yellow tulip that was undoubtedly based upon the same model as tulips that appear in some of Mignon’s flower paintings (among others figs. AU 22 and 26), the execution in the Stockholm painting, with numerous glazes, confirms de Heem’s authorship. The same is true for the tulip at upper right. The peony poppy at upper centre, however, is virtually identical with an example by Mignon in a painting in the Louvre and fully
compatible with other examples of the flower by Mignon from the second half of the 1660s. The peony at lower right is the same as the one in the Louvre bouquet, and the snowball, in type and execution, is highly similar to Mignon’s in that painting. The pink rose is a de Heem flower, very similar to the one that already had appeared in cat. nos. A 203 and A 204. The branch of pear blossom to the right is identical to the one in a Mignon in private hands (fig. AU 29, above) that may have been contributed to that painting by de Heem. The (faded) yellow rose in cat. no. A 218 is also based upon the same study as the one in that bouquet. Several other flowers, such as the carnation and the dented morning glories occur similarly with both de Heem and Mignon and it is virtually impossible to identify a hand for each individual flower, particularly given the fact that both artists may also have collaborated on several of the flowers. In all, cat. no. A 218 is clearly a collaboration between de Heem and Mignon, at least for the floral bouquet. The way in which it is recorded in Diego Duarte’s 1682 inventory does suggest, however, that de Heem had sold the painting to him – assuming that he was indeed the first owner – as fully autograph.

A closely related bouquet of flowers was auctioned in Frankfurt am Main in 1921 (cat. no. A 219) and unfortunately it is only known from the small black-and-white illustration in the catalogue of that sale. Consequently, it is impossible to tell whether Mignon did also contribute to that painting. The peony poppy in top is a close variant of the one in Stockholm, the tulip is similar to those in cat. nos. A 204 and 205, and the columbine is the same as in cat. no. A 214. Other flowers in this bouquet make their first appearance with de Heem, such as the Chinese lantern flower at lower right. This also appears to be the first instance in which de Heem placed his bouquet in a ribbed glass vase, as in several later works.
The still life motifs in the painting in Stockholm (cat. no. A 218) relate directly to a group of paintings with similar subjects: oysters, fruit, porcelain, and glass upon a table. Cat. no. A 220, in private hands, includes the exact same orange with its leaves and a porcelain bowl with the same decoration as the Stockholm still life does. Undoubtedly de Heem used the same bowl as a model for both paintings, but adapted its height and width to his composition. The same bowl, also with a ladle in it, recurs in cat. nos. A 221 and A 222 and probably also in cat. no. A 224. Like most of the porcelain in de Heem’s paintings it is an example of Wanli porcelain from the early seventeenth century. The oysters in this painting recall those in cat. no. A 216, and similarly the lemon relates to the one in that painting. The treatment of the rummer, with its reflections and transparency is highly similar to that of the vases in the flower paintings discussed above. Another painting in the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm (cat. no. A 221) is a more elaborate version of cat. no. A 220. The basic composition has remained the same, but de Heem has added branches of fruit and of nuts, stalks of wheat, a snail, and a smouldering taper, as well as a butterfly. These additions allow for an interpretation like that of the other Stockholm painting (cat. no. A 218), as a representation of the four elements. An interesting change must have occurred as an afterthought: the artist obviously decided to replace the bread roll with an open pomegranate only after painting the bread. As a result, the pomegranate has retained the shape of the bread roll on its left side. The added butterfly here is similar to that in drawing D 01 discussed above. It may be that de Heem decided to leave out the butterflies in the painting related to the drawing, cat. no. A 216, since he did not cater for the element of Fire in it either.

More modest in composition than cat. nos. A 220 and 221 is a still life in Karlsruhe (cat. no. A 222), which also includes the same bowl, as well as a similar Venetian-style glass, this time holding white wine. The painting has probably lost some of its strength as a result of discoloration. The pigments of the lemon will have included orpiment (schietgeel) which has faded; the effect is probably more dramatic here than in other lemons, since this example is whole, not peeled. Also, the tablecloth may have had a glaze of red lacquer and would thus have been redder or more purple. An unusual motif is the anemone hanging down in front of the table. It is somewhat skimpy, particularly its stem, and it distracts the viewer’s attention somewhat, but it was planned there by the artist from the outset and a such is an integral part of the painting.

Abraham Mignon also produced several still lifes in the same vein. Other than his flower paintings, however, there can hardly be any confusion with de Heem’s work. Since de Heem’s examples will have originated after 1665, Mignon probably already had developed much of his own style by then and adopted motifs, but not the handling from de Heem’s examples. A painting in the
A festoon with religious symbols

An exceptional work in de Heem’s oeuvre from this period is a large festoon of fruit and a few flowers, in the Galleria Sabauda in Turin (cat. no. A 223). At lower left, under the festoon, it includes a crucifix lying on its back, and to the right there are a bread roll and a rummer encircled by a narrow paper scroll inscribed with references to chapters in the Old Testament. Cornelia Diekamp (2001) has analysed the iconography of this painting in depth, and concluded that the symbolism can be interpreted both from a Catholic point of view as well as from a Protestant one. Thematically and in terms of composition, there is a connection with de Heem’s painting from 1653 in Dublin (cat. no. A 173), but the vanitas aspect is absent here and the emphasis lies more on the Eucharist, also through the biblical references on the scroll at lower right. It mentions Genesis 18:14, Leviticus 2:1, Exodus 12:3, and Exodus 25, all of which deal with offerings, the first of bread and wine. The painting is of a high quality of execution and may well have been an important commission, but unfortunately nothing is known of its early history, although it supposedly was part of the collection of Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663-1736), but in view of the fact that he was only a toddler when it was painted, he was not its first owner.

The sumptuous bunches of grapes recall those in cat. no. A 209, the carnation and the two roses are closely related to examples in various flower paintings, while other motifs, such as the melon, the brimstone butterfly and the stalks of wheat are also recurring features. There is also a strong degree of similarity with the Maurithuis garland (cat. no. A 208). All of these similarities suggest an origin of this painting around the same period, the mid- to second-half 1660s. In several of his festoons, Abraham Mignon also placed two large vine leaves at the top of the composition.533 Due to the absence of exact dates for these paintings it is impossible to tell whether Mignon borrowed the
feature from de Heem, or vice versa. Interestingly, Diekamp (2001) has noted, with the assistance of an entomologist, that de Heem’s rendering of the various insects is accurate, but he occasionally adapted their poses to the composition, while the animals in question would never assume that particular pose in nature. She also found that the scorpion de Heem has introduced at the bottom of the composition was painted after a Hoefnagel print, which does not render the animal’s anatomy properly.

The quince and the pomegranate to the left of the composition of the Turin festoon reappear in a still life now in the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne (cat. no. A 224), which is also closely related in type and atmosphere to the three still lifes discussed above (cat. nos. A 220-222). This painting is somewhat larger and more elaborate, however, and the emphasis lies predominantly on the fruit. This still life shares its silver-gilt cup-and-cover with cat. nos. A 199 and 209, and earlier examples, as well as with several examples by Mignon, among others with a still life in the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (fig. AU 6, above). Mignon’s painting must be a relatively early work that draws strongly on de Heem’s input. In cat. no. A 224, de Heem has reintroduced the propped-up white napkin, a motif he had abandoned in 1652. Such a napkin also plays a role in cat. no. A 226, a smaller and more modest composition, which nevertheless clearly connects with cat. no. A 224, as well as with cat. no. A 222. It is also closely related to two still lifes of almost the same size and type of composition, cat. nos. A 227 and 228, which must have originated at about the same time. Like cat. no. A 224, A 226 and 227 feature a large rummer with a conical cuppa and flat appliques on the stem, which makes its first appearance here. It also appears in a somewhat larger still life of highly refined execution in private hands, in combination with a Venetian-style wine glass and a tall ‘flute’ wineglass (cat. no. A 229). These five still lifes, cat. nos. A 222, A 224 and A 226 - 228, make up a rather coherent group. They all share the same bread roll, be it in different poses and with different details, which de Heem could of course vary at will. In four of the five, the wine rummer is adorned with a laurel wreath, as if to praise the wine. In all four, there is an orange, the most prominent in cat. nos. A 227 and 228. As in previous cases, it remains impossible to connect them with an Orangist iconography without any further evidence.
It can be noted that many of Mignon’s still lifes from this period also include a relatively prominent orange. Both artists were most likely working for the same clientele, be it probably on somewhat different levels. Oysters can be found in all these still lifes, prominently or in addition to more prominent motifs, except for in cat. no. A 229, in which a large ham is an eye-catching motif, interestingly in combination with a melon, the latter of the same type as in slightly earlier still lifes, such as cat. nos. A 209 and 210. Three also include a smouldering taper and sulfur matches, but in only two (cat. nos. A 228 and 229) there is also a clay pipe, which is however at least half-hidden. No profound iconographic meaning should probably be read in those works, however. Comparing them with examples discussed above, three of the four elements are present in most – Earth, Water and Fire – but there are no flying creatures to represent Air. As a matter of fact, these still lifes are completely unpopulated, unlike in earlier examples, and there are also no snails.

Elias van den Broeck

In September of 1669, De Heem had a contract drawn up for the tuition of Elias van den Broeck (1651/52-1708), for two years, for which he was to receive 200 guilders annually. This was a substantial sum for tuition only. Van den Broeck lived with his aunt and had to pay for his own materials and equipment, but would receive the revenues of his own work.539 Elias van den Broeck had been apprenticed at fourteen, first to a silver smith, and shortly after that to the still-life painter Cornelis Kick (1631/34-1681), with whom he had spent four years before signing up as a pupil with de Heem, so he must already have been an almost fully-trained artist at that point in time.540 Van den Broeck later accompanied de Heem when he returned to Antwerp in 1672 and worked there until after his master’s death, returning to
Amsterdam in 1685. Like Maria van Oosterwijck and unlike Abraham Mignon, van den Broeck does not appear to have attempted to mimic de Heem’s style and handling. Only one dated example of van den Broeck’s work is known, a small still life of fruit and oysters upon a stone ledge, from 1676, so from after his move with de Heem to Antwerp. A still life bearing a de Heem signature at upper right (fig. AU 34) is closely related in style and theme to cat. nos. A 222 and A 226, with a very similar tablecloth, bread roll, pewter plate and oysters. It is slightly reminiscent of Elias van den Broeck’s mature still lifes on a table, while there is also some reminiscence of still lifes by Elias’ former teacher Cornelis Kick from the second half of the 1660’s, but it is impossible to attribute it firmly to van den Broeck. If he was its author, it was probably painted around 1670.

Another landscape painting by Jan Davidsz. de Heem

Next to the still lifes discussed above, de Heem’s most elaborate landscape painting (cat. no. A 231) most probably also originated during his Utrecht years. It is signed ‘I D Heem’, a form of signing the artist appears to have reserved for exceptional work. His earlier small landscape painting, cat. no. A 103, discussed in the previous chapter, is signed in the same manner and so is the small contribution to de Formentrou’s gallery painting (cat. no. A 178). While the earlier landscape shows strong similarities with the background-landscapes in de Heem’s larger still lifes from the mid-1640s, the present landscape is similar in handling to landscape motifs in still lifes from the 1650s and 1660s, such as cat. nos. A 190 and 232. Unfortunately it is known only from a black-and-white photo. It represents a rocky coast with small figures pushing and pulling on huge ice-floes that have accumulated upon the shore.
The figures are not very well modelled, and the scene as a whole feels somewhat empty, the cloudy evening sky occupying about half of the picture plane. The people on the shore appear to be gathering lumps of ice, presumably for storage in ice chambers. The representation of this activity appears to be unprecedented and one wonders what de Heem’s incentive may have been to choose it. Perhaps it was the result of a specific commission or favour. The painting has been executed with the Heem’s usual meticulous attention to detail, compare for instance that of the figure in the small sailing vessel at sea and that of another ship cast upon the shore in the distance. The handling of the rocks is reminiscent of those in de Heem’s out-door still lifes from 1653 to 1655, cat. no. A 190 in particular, while the rather dramatically lit sky is similarly related, but there are also distinct similarities to motifs in cat. nos. A 210 and 232, which suggests that it was indeed done in Utrecht.545

An exceptional forest-floor still life

Extremely populated, and highly detailed, particularly for such a large canvas, is a view of a pond or stream in a rocky landscape, with a dead tree adorned with cultivar flowers beside it (cat. no. A 232).546 With the composition of this painting, de Heem elaborates on that of his forest-floor still life in Dresden (cat. no. A 210). Judging from the handling and palette, however, de Heem would also appear to have been inspired by Abraham Mignon’s adaptations of the theme. The palette is much stronger and the handling less soft than in the Dresden painting. But while the painting shares several motifs with works by Mignon, there can be little doubt that the execution is de Heem’s alone.547 For instance, de Heem’s frogs clearly have a wet, somewhat slimy skin, while Mignon’s, without exception, look dry and rubbery.548 The flying goldfinch also appears in a Mignon, but de Heem’s handling of it is much softer, which does not necessarily suggest that de Heem’s painted finch precedes Mignon’s – they may both have been working after an example that was kept in the studio – a study, or even a stuffed bird.549

The quality in handling of de Heem’s goldfinch is similar to that in cat. no. A 210 (Dresden). Apart from de Heem’s pure landscapes, this is the painting with the most elaborate landscape motifs in his entire oeuvre. The handling of the rocky environment is closely related to that of his coastal
landscape with ice-floes (cat. no. A 231) discussed above. The floral arrangement shares its basic composition and arrangement with that of a floral bouquet in a glass vase on a stone ledge, surrounded by small fruit, now in the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid (cat. no. A 233). The three roses, pink, white and yellow, and the white lily hold the same positions in the two arrangements, but the lily has fewer flowers in Madrid. The position of other flowers, namely the white-and-red poppy anemone and the morning glories, has been shifted, while yet others have been replaced by different blooms or are missing. Of the flowers in the forest-floor painting, several are closely reminiscent in shape and handling of examples in somewhat earlier flower paintings, such as the blue iris and the large poppies that show similarities with cat. no. A 205 in Cambridge. There are also similarities with flowers in paintings that probably originated somewhat later, such as the garland around the portrait of the young William III (cat. no. A 237, Lyons).

Since cat. no. A 232 was only first recorded in the nineteenth century, we unfortunately have no firm idea of its early history. It appears to have been accessible, however, to artists such as Rachel Ruysch (1664-1750) and Ernst Stuven (1657-1712) in Amsterdam in the late seventeenth century. In view of the unusual subject and composition, we must assume that de Heem painted this exceptional forest floor at the request of, and most likely also according to certain specifications from a specific patron. Rachel Ruysch’s father, Dr. Frederik Ruysch (1638-1731) might be considered as such. Ruysch was a highly regarded physician and professor of anatomy, an enthusiast collector of all kinds of specimens of natural history, and he is known to also have possessed a collection of paintings. Around the time de Heem painted this still life, Ruysch was already a professor in Amsterdam, but only about 30 years old, so perhaps he did not yet have the means to commission such a prestigious work. By 1685, when Rachel Ruysch first used de Heem’s painting for inspiration, however, he may well have become its owner. Otherwise, it seems likely that the painting was available to artists in another Amsterdam cabinet; the Ruysches belonged to the upper class and Rachel undoubtedly had easy access to many important Amsterdam collections.

A faithful copy of cat. no. A 232 of rather high quality is part of the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, on permanent loan to the Staatsgalerie in Bamberg (cat. A 232, copy a). In recent literature, that painting has always been regarded as a period copy. Interestingly, however, it includes a construction at the left inside of the arch of the bridge that turned out to be a later addition which was removed from the original during cleaning in 1991, together with changes in the sky that were also removed at that time, but that appear in the copy. Moreover, it appears that the copyist meticulously imitated the discoloration of the yellow rose and particularly that of the yellow iris, which indicates that the copy was done at least several decades later than the original, when the orpiment with which de Heem painted these flowers had already faded. In other words, this copy needs not be explained in the context of de Heem’s (and Mignon’s) studio practice and most probably also postdates Rachel Ruysch’s and Ernst Stuven’s interpretations of it.

Ruysch’s earliest adaptation of de Heem’s composition, dated 1685, interestingly, is the most free, to such a degree that it seems possible that it derives from a different example by de Heem or Mignon. On the other hand, of her three versions, the background landscape, or better: her indication of it, follow de Heem’s sloping rocky background the closest. There is, however, a substantial difference in the choice and arrangement of the flowers. A slightly later version follows de Heem’s example rather closely, leaving out a few details, shifting others, and adding a personal choice of butterflies. This clearly shows that Rachel Ruysch had access to de Heem’s painting, probably somewhere in Amsterdam. Another Amsterdam artist, Ernst Stuven, clearly also had access to the painting. He also emulated this type of image and copied several of the flowers into his own
floral compositions. A case in point is a still life in the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden, which due to an apocryphal signature has had a long life as a painting by Jan Davidsz. de Heem (fig. AU 35). In this respect it is interesting to note that in 1688 a former housemaid of Stuven declared that three year earlier, she had witnessed that on ‘zeecker grote Blomstuck’ (a certain large flower painting) Stuven had put ‘de naam van eenen schilder van Heem’ (the name of a painter van [de] Heem).  

AU 35 Ernst Stuven, Flowers in a glass vase, with signature ‘J.D.De Heem R’, oil on canvas, 85,5 x 67,5 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, inv. no. 1266.

**Three floral bouquets and a prestigious cartouche still life for William III**
Two bouquets of flowers (cat. nos. A 235 and 236) show the same vase and stems in it as cat. no. A 233, the small flower painting related to cat. no. A 232, discussed above.
The larger one, cat. no. A 235, now in Leipzig, is one of de Heem’s most elaborate and immaculately preserved flower paintings. It is about the same size as the two bouquets in St. Petersburg and Cambridge (cat. nos. A 204 and 205), but the composition has become more curvy and the handling is somewhat dryer and sharper, particularly in the foliage, clearly showing the result of working side-by-side with Abraham Mignon, whose tendency to a rather sharp rendering appears to have had its effect on de Heem by 1670. Still, de Heem applies more glazes to his flowers than Mignon would.

The same is true for cat. no. A 236, in the collection of the Royal Museums for Fine Art in Brussels, which is in fact a simpler variant of cat. no. A 235, including, but shifting some of the main flowers (two roses, the African marigold, the wavy tulip at top right and the peony at lower right), as well as some of the smaller flowers. The rather prominent small yellow rose in the centre was replaced by a yellow hibiscus. It is interesting to observe how the same basic composition works entirely different in its reduced arrangement. Obviously, de Heem has retained the (life) size of the flowers, which left him less space for spatial effects attained by the addition of the peripheral circle of flowers (the two large peony poppies and the yellow-and-red tulip) and the corn cob in the larger bouquet. As a result, the grandeur of the Leipzig picture makes place for intimacy in the Brussels version.

A painting on copper in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (cat. no. A 234) had a long life as a work of Rachel Ruysch, whose signature had been inscribed on it. There can be no doubt, however, that it originated in de Heem’s Utrecht studio, probably in the early 1670s. It shows many similarities in handling with cat. no. A 235, as well as with some slightly earlier bouquets such as cat. no A 212, which is also on copper. For some flowers, particularly the anemone at lower left, and for most of the green leaves, it may be suspected that Abraham Mignon contributed (to) their execution. The globular pink rose at lower left is of a type that frequently occurs in Mignon’s flower pieces and only this once in a de Heem painting. Its execution, with various glazes, does not unequivocally point to Mignon, however, and is very close to that of the round pink rose in cat. no. A 235. The format of this painting is unusually high; it may be that an existing copper plate was provided to the artist, to which he had to adapt his composition. The arrangement of the flowers is rather dense and it is interesting to note that, exceptionally, the majority of the flowers, the central roses in particular, are larger than in other paintings by either de Heem or Mignon; most of them are consequently somewhat larger than life. Whether this and the unusual format where the result of a special commission, can only remain open to speculation.

The last of de Heem’s paintings that arguably originated in his Utrecht years is a prestigious cartouche still life around a portrait of the young Prince William III (cat. no. A 237). In his account on Jan Davidsz. de Heem, Arnold Houbraken prominently featured this painting.557 He wrote: “Onder alle muntte uit zeker groot Taferaal, gemaakt met een krans van allerhande Fruit en Bloemen, ’t geen hy voor den Konstminnende Johan vander Meer, die ook als Konstschilder op zyn beurt ten Toneel zal komen, schilderde, die hem daar voor betaalde de somme van 2000 gulden. Dezen vander Meer die een Loodwitmakery en treffelyke woning buiten Utrecht hadde, trof het ongeluk, dat de soldaten in den jare 1672 dit alles tot den grond toe verwoesten, zoo dat hy daar door in een slegten staat raakte. Dit stuk ter naauwer nood voor de woede geborgen, scheen hem de eenigste hoop te wezen tot herstelling; des hy besloot met goedkeuring van den Heer van Zuilestein dit ten present te schenken aan zyn Hoogheid den Prince van Oranje, naderhand Koning van Engeland, met verbeelding van eenig ampt daar door te zullen verkrygen, en des te meer, om dat de soldaten van den Staat wel voornamentlyk de oorzaak van zyn bederf waren geweest. Dit geschiede. Dog hy liet voor af, om het te meer smakelyk te maken aan den Stadhouder, deszelfs beeltenis in ’t midden van gemelde Fruit en Bloemkrans schilderen.” (Among his works a certain large image excelled, a painted wreath of all
kinds of flowers and fruit, which he painted for the art-loving Johan van der Meer [Jan Vermeer van Utrecht (1630-1695/97)], who in his turn will also be featured here as a painter, who paid him the sum of 2000 guilders for it. This van der Meer, who owned a lead white factory and a good house outside of Utrecht, was struck by the misfortune that the soldiers destroyed his property down to the ground in the year 1672, as a result of which he got into a poor state. Having saved this piece from the fury in the nick of time, it appeared to represent his only hope of recovery; thus he decided to offer it, with consent of the Lord of Zuilestein [William Henry Nassau de Zuylestein (1649-1708)], to his Highness the Prince of Orange, later King of England, imagining to be given some function in return, even more so since the soldiers of the State had been the main cause of his misfortune. Thus happened. But in advance, to make it more to the Stadtholder’s taste, he had the latter’s effigy painted in the centre of the said garland of fruit and flowers.

Although Houbraken’s information on de Heem and his work was arguably not accurate in every respect, we must assume that the core of this story is true. Cat. no. A 237, now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lyons, is the only painting in de Heem’s oeuvre that fits the description and moreover it was part of the collection of the House of Orange until it was abducted by the French troops in May of 1795. It seems highly unlikely, however, that the painting was not destined to contain the Prince’s portrait from the outset. The entire iconography of the surrounding motifs belong with it, as demonstrated by, among others, Beatrijs Brenninkmeijer-de Rooy. Next to the eagles and the lion as symbols of power, there are several oranges (one in the protective paws of the lion), an orange lily just below the portrait, an orange marigold, the orange physalis, as well as an orange-tip butterfly. It may even be that the over-ripe fruit refers to the young Stadtholder having ripened enough to take office. It is generally agreed upon that the portrait was loosely based on the young Prince William’s portrait by Abraham de Ragueneau (1623-1681 or later), which is only known through a number of copies. In the Ragueneau portrait, which dates from about 1661, however, the sitter is wearing a collar, instead of the cravat shown here. A portrait in print with a very similar cravat was published in 1667, adapting it to the latest fashion (fig. AU 36). In any case, the portrait in the de Heem is not an exact copy; also the features of the Prince are somewhat flattered: his characteristic hawk-nose
was straightened and his cheeks are more rounded. The question is who painted this portrait. Houbraken states that Vermeer had the portrait painted in, suggesting that it was done by another hand. However, judging from the group portrait he himself painted of the regents of the Ambachtskinderhuis (an orphanage) in Utrecht in 1679-1680, so about ten years later, the handling of the faces in that portrait is entirely similar to that of William’s effigy in the de Heem (fig. AU 37).

Unfortunately, very few works by Vermeer are known to us, among them only this one (group) portrait, and he appears to initially have painted predominantly for pleasure, since he was from a wealthy family and married a wealthy widow. He was, however, head of the Utrecht painters guild in 1663 and its dean from 1664 to 1666. As such, he must have been well acquainted with de Heem and a proper collaboration between the two is far from unlikely. It may well be, that de Heem also collaborated on the portrait, perhaps by painting the orange sash with gold fringes. Another question is whether de Heem also painted the lion at the bottom, which was clearly done separately from the still-life elements, which were painted around and over it. The handling of the animal is softer than one would expect of de Heem. Perhaps Vermeer was also responsible for that part of the painting?

We may wonder whether Houbraken’s mention of the price of 2000 guilders that Vermeer would have paid to de Heem for the cartouche still life was accurate. It may well be that Vermeer exaggerated this amount somewhat in order to emphasize the importance of his gift to the Prince and the reward he expected for it. On the other hand, given Vermeer’s wealth and de Heem’s status as a highly important artist, the amount will also not have deviated substantially from the truth. Houbraken’s story gives testimony to Jan Davidsz. de Heem’s success in Utrecht, but it also shows why he will have opted to return to Antwerp in 1672. The invasion of the French had disrupted the Dutch economy to no small degree and Jan Vermeer was not the only wealthy man to see his capital evaporate. De Heem may well have sensed that he would be better off with his Antwerp customers – no doubt he still had many connections in that town – and ventured to try his luck down south.