

Utrecht in 1649, he also resided there between 1667 and 1672; he rejoined its painter's guild in 1669. Following the French invasion of the city in 1672, De Heem returned to Antwerp, where he lived until his death in 1683 or 1684.

The few works known from De Heem's first Utrecht period resemble those of the still-life painter Balthasar van der Ast (q.v.). While active in Leiden, De Heem painted tonal still lifes with vanitas subjects—books, writing and smoking implements, musical instruments, skulls, and hourglasses—that relate to works by contemporary Leiden artists David Bailly (1584–1657) and Harmen Steenwijck (1612–after 1656). Following his move to Antwerp, the work of Flemish still-life painter Daniel Seghers (1590–1661) provided an important model for De Heem. His compositions became more elaborate, and he depicted bouquets and garlands of flowers, baskets of fruit, and other motifs, such as glasses, insects, and illusionistically painted drapery. Occasionally he incorporated background views to a distant landscape or seascape.

During his long and productive career De Heem was especially admired for the realistic way he painted gold and silver. His paintings vary from small cabinet pieces to large banquet paintings containing luxurious *pronk* objects. He also is known to have collaborated with other painters, including Jan Lievens (1607–1674). Among his many students and followers were Abraham Mignon (q. v.), Cerstiaen Luyckx (1623–after 1674), and Joris van Son (1623–1667).

#### Bibliography

Houbraken 1753, 1: 209–212.  
Bergström 1956: 191–228.  
De Mirimonde 1970.  
Bergström 1988.  
Meijer 1988b.  
Delft 1988: 141–164.  
Bok 1990.  
Utrecht 1991.

1961.6.1 (1649)

### *Vase of Flowers*

c. 1660  
Oil on canvas, 69.6 x 56.5 (27<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 22<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>)  
Andrew W. Mellon Fund

#### Inscriptions

At lower left on parapet: *J. D. De Heem f.*

**Technical Notes:** The support, a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric with irregularly spun threads, has been lined with the tacking margins trimmed. Cusping is visible along all edges.

Paint is applied over a thin, smooth off-white ground in thin, liquid layers blended wet into wet. Outer flowers are painted over the dark background, while the central bouquet is painted directly over the white ground. The red-and-white poppy is painted over a light green underlayer. Reserves were left for details when final glazes were applied. Thin glazes are slightly abraded. Small losses in the background have been retouched. No major treatment has been carried out since acquisition.

**Provenance:** Baron Edmond de Rothschild [1845–1934], France. Mr. McIntosh, Bridge Allen, Scotland.<sup>1</sup> (William Hallsborough Gallery, London, 1958). (Fritz Nathan and Peter Nathan, Zurich, 1959); (Paul Rosenberg & Co., New York, in 1961).

**Exhibited:** *Exhibition of Fine Paintings and Drawings of Four Centuries*, William Hallsborough Gallery, London, 1958. *Jan Davidsz de Heem en zijn Kring*, Centraal Museum, Utrecht; Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig, 1991, no. 30. *The Age of the Marvelous*, Hood Museum of Art, Hanover, New Hampshire; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, 1991, no. 157.

THE EXTRAORDINARY DELIGHT the Dutch and Flemish took in the richness of the visual world is nowhere better expressed than in the flower paintings of Jan Davidsz. de Heem. In his *Vase of Flowers*, the brightly colored blossoms, fruits, vegetables, and grains that seem to burst forth from the glass vase are painted with such sensitivity that they seem almost alive. Whether it be in the translucency of the petals, the sheen of dew drops on the leaves, or the minute insects that crawl about the stems and blossoms, De Heem has exerted painstaking care to capture the very essence of the still-life elements that make up his composition.

While De Heem's concern with illusionism was shared by other still-life painters, none matched his ability to convey a sense of organic life. Poppies, tulips, roses, wheat, and peas reach out in dynamic rhythms, while insects crawl and flutter about as though the air around them were rife with the varied smells of the richly laden bouquet. Through his artifice, De Heem has allowed the viewer not only to enjoy the beauty of the individual forms but also to imagine the richness of their fragrances. He has done so, moreover, with an arrangement of flowers, fruits, and vegetables that would never have been placed together in the same bouquet, for they grow at different seasons of the year.

While De Heem's ability to capture the full range of one's sensual experiences in appreciating flowers is exceptional, the underlying attitude in his work

reflects concerns that were fundamental to still-life painting since the early seventeenth century. For example, Cardinal Borromeo, the patron of Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1625), wrote how he enjoyed the sight of the flowers during icy winters and the pleasure he received from imagining the odors of the flowers.<sup>2</sup> In 1646 a Dutch poet, Joachim Oudaan, described not only the beauty of the blossoms but also the fragrance of a still-life painting.<sup>3</sup>

De Heem's dynamic yet harmonious composition is also exceptional, but, once again, the fundamentals of his arrangement belong to a long-standing tradition. In the early seventeenth century, symmetrically arranged bouquets of flowers by Ambrosius Bosschaert (1573–1621) were dominated by a large, centrally placed blossom. Stems of flowers were relatively short and flowers did not overlap. De Heem's work has evolved from this fairly rigid format—he breaks the symmetry, overlaps blossoms, and, in particular, creates rhythms through his greatly elongated plant stems.

Fig. 1. Jan Davidsz. de Heem, *Memento Mori*, c. 1653, oil on canvas, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Finally, De Heem's decision to include so many types of flowers and insects from different seasons of the year in his composition does not differ substantially from the work of many of his predecessors. Such artfully constructed compilations of elements that could never be seen together in nature gave still-life painting a status it could never have achieved if the artist had remained servile to the specifics of nature. Such a composition as this, while built upon careful observation of God's wonders, emphasized the importance of the role of the artist's imagination. That such a still life was far more than mere craft was also confirmed by the symbolic associations De Heem brought to the work. The transient beauty of flowers, for example, was commonly used metaphorically to remind the viewer of the temporality of life. The bugs and snails that climb about the blossoms were understood allegorically to represent forces that help hasten the demise of temporal beauty. While De Heem clearly wished to convey this concept, by including such a wide range of seasons he also sought to make a statement about the value of art. These flowers will continue to blossom after nature's flowers have died and withered. Indeed, the concept *Ars longa, vita brevis* was fundamental to seventeenth-century northern still-life painting.

De Heem's flower still lifes often had specific moral, and even religious, connotations. Occasionally this Catholic artist included a skull and the words *memento mori* adjacent to a flower piece (fig. 1); in other instances he added a crucifix. In such cases, careful analyses of the flowers and grains he has included in his composition indicate that they were chosen because of the symbolic associations that were attached to them.<sup>4</sup> The question then arises whether similar symbolic associations exist regarding the flowers and other plants in paintings with no explicit symbols of death or resurrection.<sup>5</sup> In the case of the National Gallery's painting the answer is most certainly yes.

This carefully conceived composition was not only a compilation of the beauties of God's creations, a statement of the value of art, and a reminder of the transitoriness of life, it also put forth the hope of salvation and resurrection. While no crucifix exists in this work, the allusion to the cross in the reflection of the window on the glass vase serves the same purpose. Within such a context the prominent position of the white poppy upon which a butterfly alights has to be understood symbolically.<sup>6</sup> The poppy, which was associated with sleep and death, often alluded to the Passion of Christ, and the butterfly to the Resurrection. Other flowers, grains,



Jan Davidsz. de Heem, *Vase of Flowers*, 1961.6.1

fruits, and vegetables reinforce this message. The morning glory, for example, symbolizes the light of truth, for it opens at the break of day and closes in the evening. The bramble, which was believed to be the burning bush in which the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses, was associated with divine love that cannot be consumed. Grains of wheat can allude to the bread of the Last Supper, but they can also symbolize resurrection, because the grain must fall to earth to regenerate. Like wheat, or peas, man must die and be buried before achieving eternal life.

*Vase of Flowers* is signed but not dated. Although De Heem's chronology is not easy to reconstruct, he probably executed this painting in Utrecht around 1660.<sup>7</sup> The painting has more elaborate rhythms in its forms and a more complex iconography than does De Heem's similar composition from the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, which is signed and dated 1654. However, it cannot date too much later than the Dresden painting from the mid-1650s (fig. 1), which contains many like elements, including a poppy at the top of the composition and the image of a cross in the reflection on the vase. In any event, the composition must have been known by Abraham Mignon (q.v.) in Utrecht, for after he joined De Heem's workshop in 1669 he executed a *Vase of Flowers* that shares many similar elements.<sup>8</sup>

#### Notes

1. The names of the previous owners Rothschild and McIntosh were provided by Nathan and Nathan, but without documentation.

2. See Wheelock in Washington 1989a, 14–15.
3. See Lawrence O. Goedde, "A Little World Made Cunningly: Dutch Still Life and Ekphrasis," in Washington 1989a, 40.
4. For an analysis of the *Flower Piece with Shell and Skull* in Dresden (fig. 1), see Utrecht 1991, cat. 28, 181–184.
5. For the identity of the plants and animals in this painting, see Segal in Utrecht 1991, 187.
6. Much has been written on the symbolism of flowers in Dutch art. For an excellent overview of the problem, see Sam Segal, "The Symbolic Meaning of Flowers," in Amsterdam 1982b, 12–25; see also Segal in Utrecht 1991, 182–184.
7. For a similar De Heem composition, also undated, see Fechner 1981, 28, 169, pl. 62–63.
8. For this painting, see Rotterdam, 1989, cat. 23, 94–95.

#### References

- 1958 Bury: 175–177.
- 1958 Nicholson: 145.
- 1963 Walker: 198–199, color repro.
- 1964 Walker: 198–199, color repro.
- 1965 Pavière: 20, colorplate 7.
- 1965 NGA: 66, no. 1649.
- 1968 NGA: 58, no. 1649, repro.
- 1975 NGA: 172–173, repro.
- 1982b Amsterdam: 12–25.
- 1984 Wheelock: 18–19, color repro.
- 1985 NGA: 199, repro.
- 1988 Grimm: 143.
- 1989 Rotterdam: no. 23.
- 1989a Washington: 14–15.
- 1991 Utrecht: no. 30.
- 1992 NGA: 127 color repro.

## Jan van der Heyden

1637–1712

JAN VAN DER HEYDEN was born 5 March 1637 in Gorkum, the third of eight children. His eldest brother, Goris, was a mirror maker by trade, and Van der Heyden's first training in art came from a local glass painter. The difficult—and irreversible—technique of painting images on the back of a sheet of glass enjoyed a certain popularity at the time, and several works of this type by Van der Heyden have survived. On 26 June 1661, in Amsterdam, he married Sara ter Hiel of Utrecht. He is known to have been practicing as an artist at this time, but no dated paintings survive from before 1664.

Van der Heyden's oeuvre is largely composed of cityscapes and other depictions of groups of buildings, although he did paint about forty pure landscapes. Some of his works are relatively faithful depictions of a real location, but many others are entirely imaginary architectural fantasies. Typically, his scenes are bathed in a brilliant, crisp light of almost unnatural clarity and characterized by remarkable attention to detail. Throughout his paintings, minute features are painstakingly rendered with the greatest precision, and yet he never seems to have allowed this technique to stand between him