

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Kalf spent his lifetime in comfortable circumstances. He seems to have stopped painting around 1680 to concentrate his energies on being an art dealer. He died in Amsterdam on 31 July 1693 and was buried on 3 August in the Zuiderkerk.

Houbraken stated that Hendrik Gerritsz. Pot (c. 1585–1657) was Kalf's teacher, but there is little in Kalf's early work to suggest such a relationship. Because of the stylistic and coloristic resemblance between the work of François Rijckhals (d. 1647) and Kalf's early peasant kitchen interiors and *pronk* still lifes, it seems that this Rotterdam artist was an important influence on the young artist.

Kalf's mature work developed during the 1650s, after his move to Amsterdam. In these works he focused on a few objects that he organized with great restraint against a dark background. He delighted in depicting the sheen of silver, the translucency of glass, and the rich textures of intricately patterned oriental rugs. His luminous manner of painting highlights has often been compared to that of Johannes Vermeer (q.v.), and it is entirely possible that his work influenced the Delft master.

Although Kalf probably had pupils who made replicas of his work, none are documented. His most successful follower was Jurriaen van Streeck (c. 1622–1683).

#### Bibliography

- De Lairese 1740: 266–268.  
Houbraken 1753, 2: 218–219.  
Van Gelder 1941.  
Van Gelder 1942.  
Bergström 1956: 260–290.  
Grisebach 1974.  
Delft 1988: 180–196.  
Brown/MacLaren 1992: 213.

1943.7.8 (745)

### *Still Life*

c. 1660  
Oil on canvas, 64.4 x 53.8 (25<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 21<sup>1</sup>/<sub>6</sub>)  
Chester Dale Collection

**Technical Notes:** The support, a fine-weight, plain-weave fabric, has been lined with the tacking margins trimmed. The x-radiograph shows broad cusping along the top edge. A very large complex tear is present in the upper right quadrant. The double ground consists of a red lower layer and an opaque light gray upper layer. Both thin layers are brush applied and leave the weave pattern prominent.

Paint handling varies according to the surface texture being rendered, from thin opaque layers to richly textured pastes, with glazes confined to carpet details and the dark background.<sup>1</sup> Abrasion is minimal. Scattered small losses are found overall, with a larger loss in the center of the Seville orange. The tear edges have been retouched and the orange rind heavily overpainted. No major treatment has been carried out since acquisition.

**Provenance:** Possibly Jos. Dan. Böhm, Vienna; (possibly sale, Alexandre Posonyi, Vienna, 4 December 1865, no. 1682).<sup>2</sup> (Cottier & Co., New York); sold 1889 to Mrs. Henry Osborne Havemeyer [née Louise Waldron Elder] [1855–1929], New York; (sale, American Art Association, Anderson Galleries, New York, 10 April 1930, no. 46); Chester Dale [1883–1962], New York.

NESTLED in a luxurious and exotic oriental carpet is a restrained arrangement of sumptuous objects brought to life by the delicate play of light across their surfaces.<sup>3</sup> With deft touches of his brush Kalf invokes the soft texture of wool, the vitreous gleam of Chinese porcelain, the dense rind of lemon, and the transparent sheen of an elegantly wrought Venetian-style goblet. Viewed individually the objects have no logical relationship to each other, yet orchestrated as they are through Kalf's unerring sense of composition, these and the other objects he depicted come together as a harmonious whole, the rationale for which one does not even question.

As is evident from examining the full extent of his oeuvre, Kalf's style developed in quite distinct phases that parallel, to a certain extent, his periods of residence in Rotterdam, Paris, and Amsterdam. Within each phase a precise chronology is difficult to determine as he dated only a few of his paintings. Because Kalf favored a few compositional types and tended to use many of the same objects in various combinations, however, one can often arrive at an approximate chronology.

This painting, with its pyramidal composition set off-center, is one of the purest examples of a compositional format used by Kalf in Amsterdam in the late 1650s and early 1660s.<sup>4</sup> Also characteristic of this type is the presence of the Chinese porcelain fruit bowl tipped at an angle to reveal its decorated interior. This Wan-Li bowl was a favorite of Kalf's, possibly because the blues and creamy whites of the interior played off so well against the oranges, yellows, and reds of the fruit.<sup>5</sup> The tall Venetian-style goblet surmounted by a glass bird with spread wings, however, does not appear in other of his paintings. As can be frequently demonstrated, Kalf was not always scrupulously accurate in his representation of objects and varied their character to



Willem Kalf, *Still Life*, 1943-7.8

accord with his fantasy or compositional demands.<sup>6</sup> Such may be the case with this somewhat fancifully conceived goblet.

Kalf's paintings were meant for an elite audience, one that not only took pride in the mercantile prosperity of the Dutch republic, but had also shared in the wealth. His works from the Amsterdam period do not contain Dutch cheeses, breads, hams, and pies, but rather items that had been imported from the far reaches of the world—Venetian glass, oriental carpets, agate-handled knives, Seville oranges, and, above all, Chinese porcelain.<sup>7</sup> He then placed these exotic objects against a dark, contrasting background that would allow him to illuminate their forms with accents of light.

To judge from paintings such as this, Kalf's primary intent must have been to create an arrangement of elegant and luxurious objects that could be enjoyed for its aesthetic appeal. As opposed to earlier Haarlem still-life painters, he seems to have had little interest in instilling moralizing messages into his works. Confirmation of his attitude can be gained from the writings of Gerard de Lairese (1614–1711), an important Amsterdam painter and theorist who knew Kalf personally and who admired his work.<sup>8</sup> De Lairese writes that paintings of the type Kalf executed, which include “expensive items, such as gold, silver, crystal and other glasses, pearls, rare stones and pearl necklaces,” are commonly called “*Vanitassen*,” or vanitas paintings.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, according to De Lairese, Kalf did not include objects in his paintings for a specific meaning or moralizing message. Indeed, he decided which objects to paint somewhat according to whim and without any preconceived program.<sup>10</sup> While the rarity and fragility of the objects he included in his paintings might call to mind questions of transience associated with vanitas issues, these were merely by-products of his work, not the driving force behind it.

#### Notes

1. Limited pigment analysis is available in the Scientific Research Department (12 October 1983).

2. Grisebach 1974, 258, no. 102, suggests that the *Still Life* might be identified as the Böhm painting auctioned on 4 December 1865 (Alexandre Posonyi, Vienna, no. 1682). The painting in this sale, however, may have been another composition, for it is described in the auction catalogue as having four pomegranates, “vier spanische Granatäpfel.”

3. Such carpets were, and still are, often used by the Dutch as covers for tables. In the seventeenth century, they were probably only to be found in the homes of the wealthy because of their high cost. They were imported to the Netherlands from Persia and India by the Dutch East India Company. Because this particular carpet is only partially visible, and because it is possible that the artist has taken

some license in its design, its country of origin is difficult to determine. One carpet expert, Mr. Chester Ellis of Kingston, New York, has indicated that he believes it is an Indian carpet (conversation with Mr. Ellis, September 1980). For a fuller discussion of carpets in Dutch art, see Ydema 1988, 15–28; and especially Ydema 1991.

4. Grisebach 1974, 114–115, 258, cat. 102, uses this painting as the characteristic example of this type of composition. He expressly compares the painting to four other works: three paintings dated 1659, his cat. nos. 95–97; and an undated painting in the Detroit Institute of Arts, his cat. no. 100. The compositional and stylistic characteristics of this work are so similar to those of other Kalf paintings from the early 1660s that I cannot agree with Claus Grimm's assessment that the painting is the work of Jurriaen van Streeck (1622–1683). See Grimm 1988, 223, repro.

5. Kalf, who seems to have abandoned painting as a profession to be an art dealer around 1680, may well have collected Wan-Li porcelain, for he depicted many exquisite pieces in his paintings. The bowl in this painting is known as a *clapmuts* in the Netherlands. See Volker 1954, repro. 4.

6. Polak 1976, 121; Segal, in Delft 1988, 195, discusses Kalf's artistic license in reference to other paintings.

7. Porcelain made in China during the reign of Wan Li (1573–1619) was highly valued in the Netherlands. Most of it was brought by ships belonging to the Dutch East India Company, which had been founded on 20 March 1602. The real craze for Chinese porcelain occurred after the capture of Portuguese ships carrying a large cargo of Wan-Li porcelain in March 1603. When the cargo, consisting of over one hundred thousand pieces of porcelain, was sold in Amsterdam on 15 August 1604, buyers came from all over Western Europe. See Volker 1954, 22; and Le Corbeiller 1974, 1–4.

8. In a document of 1672 Kalf appeared as a witness before a notary in Amsterdam along with a number of other artists, including Gerard de Lairese. The case concerned the evaluation of Italian paintings. See Grisebach 1974, 193, doc. 20. How well De Lairese and Kalf were acquainted is not known, but to judge from De Lairese's laudatory comments about Kalf in his treatise on painting, one would assume that a friendship existed. See De Lairese 1740, 266–267. “De vermaarde *Kalf*, die veel heerlyke en uitmuntende voorbeelden daar van heeft nagelaaten, heeft in deze zeer uitgemunt, en boven allen den hoogsten lof verdiend.”

9. De Lairese 1740, 266. “Het is die welke in allerhande kostelykheden bestaat, als goud, zilver, kristalle en andere glazen, paerlen, edelgesteentens en paerlemoer, gemeenlyk *Vanitassen* genaamd.”

10. De Lairese 1740, 268:

Hoewel wy hier voor gezegt hebben, dat de vermaarde *Kalf* in de Stillevenen boven anderen heeft uitgemunt, heeft hy nochtans, zo min als zyne voorgangers en navolgers, reden van zyne verbeeldingen weeten te geeven, waarom hy dit of dat vertoonde: maar slechts het geen hem in den zin schoot (als een porcelyne pot of schaal, een goude bokaal, een fluit of roemer met wyn, en daar in een citroenschil hangende, een horologie, paerlemoere hoorn op een goude of zilvere voet, een zilvere schaal of bord met persikken, of wel opengesnedene chinaappelen of citroenen, een tapyt, en diergelyke gewoonlyke dingen) verbeeld, zonder eens zyne gedachten te hebben laten gaan om iets van belang voort te brengen daar een byzondere zin in stak, of 't geen ergens op toegepast kon worden.

## References

- 1959 NGA: 15 repro.  
1965a NGA: 71, no. 745.  
1965b NGA: no. 15, repro.  
1968 NGA: 63, no. 745 repro.  
1974 Grisebach: 114–115, 122, 130, 258, no. 102, repro.  
116.

- 1975 NGA: 184–185, repro.  
1985 NGA: 213, repro.  
1986 Sutton: 309.  
1983 Grimm: 223, repro.  
1991 Ydema: 161, no. 455.

## After Willem Kalf

1974.109.1 (2676)

### *Still Life with Nautilus Cup*

1665/1670

Oil on canvas, 68.2 x 58 (26<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 22<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub>)  
Gift of Robert H. and Clarice Smith

#### Inscriptions

At lower left on edge of table (probably by another hand):  
*W. Kalf*

**Technical Notes:** The support, a medium-weight, tightly and plain-woven fabric, is composed of irregularly spun threads and was originally stretched off-square. It has been lined with the tacking margins trimmed, although cusping present along all edges suggests that the original dimensions have been retained.

Paint is applied over a smooth, thin beige ground in thin fluid layers, with thinned liquid washes and full-bodied pastes employed to simulate surface texture. Smooth surfaces were rendered with highlights blended wet into wet, while a finger was used to texture the orange peel. Dark passages such as the background are moderately abraded, particularly the darker design elements of the rug and sugar bowl. Minor losses are scattered at random. The signature at the lower left crosses over drying crackle but not the age cracks. It was added after the paint had dried, presumably by another hand. No conservation has been carried out since acquisition.

**Provenance:** Possibly G. L. M. van Es, Wassenaar.<sup>1</sup> Probably Colonel Towers. (Leonard Koetser, London); (Edward Speelman, London, in 1946); (Pieter de Boer, Amsterdam, probably in 1950). Mr. W. Reineke, Amersfoort, 1958–1968; (Pieter de Boer, Amsterdam, and Newhouse, London); sold by (Newhouse, London) 21 January 1969 to Mr. and Mrs. Robert H. Smith, Washington.

**Exhibited:** 1948 *Exhibition of Dutch and Flemish Masters*, Eugene Slatter Gallery, London, 1948, no. 13.<sup>2</sup> *Zomertoonstelling 1950*, Pieter de Boer Gallery, Amsterdam, 1950. *Kunstbeziët rondom Laren*, Singer Museum, Laren, 1958, no. 106. *Nederlandse stilleven uit de zeventiende eeuw*, Dordrechts Museum, 1962, no. 65.

KALF'S RENOWN as an artist was such that he was eulogized in verse during his own lifetime by Jan Vos and Joost van den Vondel and written about enthusiastically in the early eighteenth century by Gerard de Lairese and Arnold Houbraken.<sup>3</sup> Although these sources provide some insight into the character of his art, they say nothing about his workshop practice. Likewise, no mention is made of students, although some artists, particularly Jurriaen van Streeck (c. 1622–1683), come so close to him in style and composition that it seems improbable that they did not spend some time in his studio.<sup>4</sup> The issue is of some consequence because two or three versions of certain of Kalf's compositions do exist. While later imitations may also have been made, it would have been consistent with seventeenth-century workshop practice for studio assistants, perhaps with the aid of the master, to make replicas of the master's most successful compositions. Even without documentary evidence to confirm the existence of a Kalf workshop, these replicas suggest that he worked with various assistants, particularly during his Amsterdam years.<sup>5</sup>

Despite exhibiting all the characteristics of a Kalf composition, *Still Life with Nautilus Cup* must be one of these replicas.<sup>6</sup> The differences in handling between this work and an authentic work by the master are clear in a comparison with the National Gallery's *Still Life* (1943.7.8), where many of the same objects appear (figs. 1 and 2). The most obvious difference between the two is in the depiction of the lemon rind. In Kalf's own hand the rind has a three-dimensional presence as it twists and turns in space. Its edges are carefully wrought to show both the irregular cut of the knife and the thickness of the skin. Finally, the rough texture of the skin has been recreated with sure touches of the brush. The illusionism is so complete that the paint seems to take on