



Jan Weenix
Dutch, 1642 - 1719

Still Life with Swan and Game before a Country Estate

c. 1685

oil on canvas

overall: 142.9 x 172.4 cm (56 1/4 x 67 7/8 in.)

framed: 173.4 x 202.3 x 14.9 cm (68 1/4 x 79 5/8 x 5 7/8 in.)

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ENTRY

This imposing game piece features the lifeless bodies of a large white goose and a reddish-brown hare arrayed with an almost aristocratic elegance in the left foreground of an expansive formal garden.[1] In addition to being larger than other pictorial elements, the goose and the hare are also more brilliantly illuminated and rendered with extraordinary care and sensitivity.[2] Indeed, the goose's downy feathers and the hare's soft fur seem so real that one could imagine their supple forms yielding to the touch.[3] Weenix extended the sweeping flow of their large bodies across the foreground and enlivened the scene with a confrontational exchange between a dove and a small dog (a papillon). The dove, standing before the dead game, has sharply turned its head and thrown back its wings in defiant response to the dog's sudden intrusion (and barking?), while the dog reacts defensively to the dove's angry posture. As though startled by the sudden commotion below, another dove flies aloft in the evening sky.

Jan Weenix learned the art of painting game pieces in the 1650s and 1660s in the studio of his father, Jan Baptist Weenix (1621–1660/1661).[4] Following a Flemish tradition established by Frans Snyders (Flemish, 1579 - 1657), Weenix's father generally situated his game pieces, including the large *Still Life with a Dead Swan* in Detroit [fig. 1], in interior settings, often animating his scenes with narrative elements such as snarling cats and dogs.[5] When Jan Weenix moved to Amsterdam in the late 1670s, he developed a new genre of game piece that features dead game gracefully arrayed before formal outdoor gardens.

The National Gallery of Art's work is neither signed nor dated, but Weenix probably painted it in the mid-1680s. The general disposition of dead game in the foreground of a formal garden, the delicacy of touch in rendering the fur, and even the position of the hare's upper body (in reverse) are comparable to Weenix's *Still Life with a Dead Hare*, 1682 (or 1683), in Karlsruhe [fig. 2]. By the 1690s Weenix's style had changed noticeably: his compositions became more complex, the poses of the animals more mannered, his modeling slicker, and his touch somewhat harder.

Weenix painted his game pieces at a time when wealthy Dutch burghers were building country houses with formal gardens outside of urban centers, such as those along the river Vecht.[6] Many of his patrons came from Amsterdam and Utrecht, near the manor house Huis ter Mey where the artist used to live with his father.[7] As is reflected in *Still Life with Goose and Game before a Country Estate*, French architectural and garden designs were greatly admired in the latter half of the seventeenth century, and their influence is seen in the country homes and richly decorated gardens constructed by the Dutch in that period.[8] Sumptuous villas with elegant gardens containing sculptures, reflecting pools, follies, and trellises were precisely the types of estates that called for Weenix's game pieces, although many of these paintings were also commissioned for the owners' urban homes.[9] Although it is not known for whom Weenix painted the Gallery's work, the Amsterdam merchant Gerret Braamcamp, whose internationally renowned collection included numerous masterpieces of Dutch art, acquired it in the middle of the eighteenth century.[10] Subsequently, it was bought by John Hope, in whose family it remained for five generations (see Provenance).

Prince William III (1650–1702) was passionate about both hunting and gardening at his estates in Dieren, Soestdijk, and Apeldoorn, and an admirer of French fashion and garden design, inspiring a number of his courtiers to follow suit during the 1670s and 1680s.[11] Nevertheless, as Scott Sullivan has convincingly argued, most of Weenix's Dutch patrons were not aristocrats—of which there were few in the Dutch Republic—but rather wealthy burghers, who were actually prohibited from hunting game such as wild geese, ducks, and swans.[12] Indeed, no guns, nets, or other hunting paraphernalia, other than a knife made from a deer antler, are depicted in *Still Life with Goose and Game before a Country Estate*. Such paintings, whether displayed in country houses or urban dwellings, allowed burghers to associate themselves with an aristocratic lifestyle and to enhance their own social prestige.[13] As Sullivan has stressed, these works were not “mementos

of the aristocratic hunter's catch."^[14]

Little is known about Weenix's painting techniques and working procedures. Judging from his accurate depictions of animals, which have allowed zoologists to identify specific species, he must have carefully studied their anatomy and the appearance of their fur and feathers. Because identical animals appear in different paintings—the papillon in the Gallery's painting, for example, is also seen at the far right of Weenix's portrait of Agnes Block and her family [fig. 3]—it is probable that he based his images of animals on drawings or oil sketches made from life.^[15] Like Melchior d'Hondecoeter (1636–1695), another master of the game piece genre during this period, Weenix seemingly worked, at least in part, from stuffed birds and animals, which would have enabled him to depict them from different angles.^[16] The angry dove, with wings outspread, for example, appears from different points of view in other of Weenix's paintings.^[17] Although Weenix occasionally represented actual garden settings, as in the background of his portrait of Agnes Block and her family, most of the gardens he depicted were imaginary.^[18] He probably based many of the sculpted urns, plinths, fountains, and trellises in his paintings on prints of French and Italian gardens and garden ornaments, which were readily available in the Dutch Republic at that time.^[19]

Weenix generally based the sculptural imagery in his game pieces on classical prototypes. The Gallery's painting, however, is unusual, if not unique, in that the relief sculpture on the large foreground plinth depicts the Holy Family. The sunlit portion of the relief reveals Mary and Joseph gazing down in quiet reverence at the Christ Child lying before them in deep shadow. The style and character of these figures owe much to Abraham Bloemaert (Dutch, 1564 - 1651), an artist whose work Weenix would have known from his years in Utrecht (Bloemaert was also his father's master).^[20] Weenix intended this game piece to express Christian ideas about death and resurrection, as is evident from the disposition of the Holy Family on the relief sculpture, the pattern of light and dark falling across the figures, and the emblematic associations of the flowers growing in front of the plinth: drooping yellow calendula, known as the "death flower" (*dodenbloem*) in Dutch, and roses, which symbolize the sorrows of the Virgin. In this context, the dove flying away from the dead goose is not just a narrative element enlivening the scene, but an essential iconographic motif symbolizing the Christian belief in the immortality of the soul.

 NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS
Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century

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COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Jan Baptist Weenix, *Still Life with a Dead Swan*, c. 1650, oil on canvas, Detroit Institute of Arts, Gift of Ralph Harman Booth. Photo: The Bridgeman Art Library

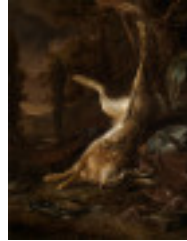


fig. 2 Jan Weenix, *Still Life with a Dead Hare*, 1682 (or 1683), oil on canvas, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe . Photo © Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe 2010. Photo: W. Pankoke



fig. 3 Jan Weenix, *Agnes Block, Sybrande de Flines and Children in their Garden at Vijverhof along the Vecht*, c. 1694, oil on canvas, Amsterdams Historisch Museum

NOTES

- [1] I would like to thank Anke van Wagenberg and Afiena van Zanten for their research on this painting.
- [2] I would like to thank Gary Graves, research scientist and curator in the Department of Vertebrate Zoology at the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, for identifying the animals in this painting (correspondence, April 6, 2005, in National Gallery of Art curatorial files).
- [3] In 1774 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) saw the wall decorations that Weenix painted between 1710 and 1714 for the Elector Palatine Johann Wilhelm von der Pfalz of Düsseldorf and described his impressions as follows: “What enchanted me there beyond measure were the wall decorations by Weenix. All animals that hunting can procure were lying there, well ordered, as on the dais of a large columnar hall; above them one looked into a vast landscape. To reanimate these inanimate creatures, this extraordinary man had marshaled his whole talent, and in rendering the

greatest variety of animal textures: bristles, hair, feathers, antlers, claws, he had equaled and, with regard to effect, surpassed nature.” This text is quoted from Scott A. Sullivan, *The Dutch Gamepiece* (Montclair, NJ, 1984), 65.

- [4] Jan Weenix’s early works are primarily genre scenes in Italianate settings that follow his father’s model. See Christine Schloss, “The Early Italianate Genre Paintings by Jan Weenix (ca. 1642–1719),” *Oud-Holland* 97 (1983): 69–97.
- [5] See Alan Chong and Wouter Kloek, *Still-Life Paintings from the Netherlands 1550–1720* (Amsterdam, 1999), 198–200, no. 41. The narrative element in the Detroit painting is lacking since it has been trimmed at the left and bottom. It is, however, evident in the painting’s probable pendant, *Dead Roebock*, c. 1650, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (see Chong and Kloek, fig. 41b). Chong and Kloek also illustrate one of Jan Baptist Weenix’s outdoor game pieces, *Landscape with a Huntsman Cutting up a Dead Deer*, c. 1650 (National Gallery, London), fig. 41a.
- [6] Erik de Jong, “‘Netherlandish Hesperides’: Garden Art in the Period of William and Mary, 1650–1702,” in “The Anglo-Dutch Garden in the Age of William and Mary,” ed. John Dixon Hunt and Erik de Jong, special issue, *Journal of Garden History* 8, nos. 2–3 (April–September 1988): 15–40, provides an excellent overview of the appeal of country houses for Dutch aristocracy in the latter half of the seventeenth century.
- [7] Jan Weenix purchased this manor house in Vleuten, just outside of Utrecht, in 1657.
- [8] The garden of the Clingendael estate near The Hague was particularly important for incorporating French formal garden designs into Dutch traditions. This garden was constructed in the 1670s and 1680s by the owner of the estate, Philips Doublet, who was married to Susanna Huygens, Constantijn Huygens’ daughter. Doublet traveled regularly to France to study gardens with his brother-in-law, Christiaan Huygens, who worked in Paris. Huygens provided Doublet with prints after French gardens, which he used when designing his own gardens. Prince William III, impressed by Doublet’s knowledge and abilities, employed Doublet to supervise changes in the garden at Huis ten Bosch. For more information about the Clingendael estate, see “The Anglo-Dutch Garden in the Age of William and Mary,” ed. John Dixon Hunt and Erik de Jong, special issue, *Journal of Garden History* 8, nos. 2–3 (April–September 1988): 180–184.
- [9] See Remmet van Luttervelt, *De buitenplaatsen aan de Vecht* (Lochem, 1970).
- [10] The fame of the artist and the quality of the painting are stressed in M. de Bastide, *Le temple des arts ou le cabinet de M. Braamcamp* (Amsterdam, 1766), 88: “Ce Tableau est peint avec cet art que possédoit, comme on le

sait, ce grant Artiste, dont le mérit est trop connu en ce genre de représentation, pour en parler ici.”

- [11] For Prince William III and the hunt, see Scott A. Sullivan, *The Dutch Gamepiece* (Montclair, NJ, 1984), 35–39.
- [12] Scott A. Sullivan, *The Dutch Gamepiece* (Montclair, NJ, 1984), 34.
- [13] Scott A. Sullivan, *The Dutch Gamepiece* (Montclair, NJ, 1984), 40.

- [14] Scott A. Sullivan, “Jan Baptist Weenix: *Still Life with a Dead Swan*,” *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 57, no. 2 (1979): 69.
- [15] See, for example, Weenix’s oil sketch of *A Squirrel Monkey*, c. 1700 (oil on canvas, 29.9 x 25.9 cm [11 3/4 x 10 1/4 in.]), which was with the art dealer Jean-Luc Baroni, London, in 2010–2011.
- [16] Marrigje Rikken, *Melchior d’Hondecoeter, Bird Painter*, trans. Michael Hoyle (Amsterdam, 2008), 51.
- [17] See Weenix’s *A Monkey and a Dog beside Dead Game and Fruits, with the Estate of Rijksdorp near Wassenaer in the Background*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (no. A 462), in which both the standing and the flying dove appear in different orientations.
- [18] Agnes Block (1629–1704) was a renowned cultivator of plants at her estate on the river Vecht, Vijverhof. For further information about Agnes Block, see “The Anglo-Dutch Garden in the Age of William and Mary,” ed. John Dixon Hunt and Erik de Jong, special issue, *Journal of Garden History* 8, nos. 2–3 (April–September 1988): 121–122.
- [19] In his early genre scenes Weenix occasionally incorporated Italian sculptures that he found either in his father’s paintings or in prints; see Christine Schloss, “The Early Italianate Genre Paintings by Jan Weenix (ca. 1642–1719),” *Oud-Holland* 97 (1983): 76–77. Specific borrowings from prints of garden designs or garden sculpture, however, have yet to be identified in his later game pieces. For the type of French prints that Weenix could have seen, see “The Anglo-Dutch Garden in the Age of William and Mary,” ed. John Dixon Hunt and Erik de Jong, special issue, *Journal of Garden History* 8, nos. 2–3 (April–September 1988).
- [20] As Jaap Bolten has noted in correspondence to Afiena van Zanten (August 6, 2007), no exact prototype from Bloemaert is known, but the style and disposition of the figures in the Holy Family are entirely in the manner of this Utrecht master.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting was executed on a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric, which has been lined. The tacking margins have been removed but the X-radiographs show cusping along all four edges. The ground appears to be a thin, reddish-brown layer. Infrared reflectography at 2.0 – 2.5 microns^[1] reveals a brushy underpainting marking the contours of some of the birds and animals. Such contours are especially noticeable in the hare, the large dead duck lying next to the hare, the dove, and the small ducks in the background near the statue.

The paint was applied wet-into-wet and is fairly thin. In some areas of the background the artist left the ground visible to serve as the mid-tones of the painting. In other areas, he only applied a glazelike layer of paint, allowing the ground to show through. Weenix employed some slight impasto in the highlights and to represent the coagulated blood near the hare and the goose. Examination with infrared reflectography revealed, in addition to the underdrawing, a number of artist's changes: the dove in the sky was shifted up and to the right; the head of the rock dove in the foreground was moved to the right, as were the goose's bill and the hare's head.

The painting is in very good condition. The paint exhibits a fine craquelure pattern that is hardly visible from normal viewing distances. Some traction crackle exists in the darkest darks, and several of these areas have been abraded. Examination under ultraviolet light reveals that the dark areas in the trees and along the path in the background, as well as in the base of the statue on the right, have been reinforced. The varnish is somewhat glossy and uneven and it is not saturating some of the darks well.

[1] Infrared reflectography was performed using a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with a K astronomy filter.

PROVENANCE

Gerret Braamcamp [1699-1771], Amsterdam, by 1752;^[1] (his estate sale, Philippe van der Schley, Amsterdam, 31 July 1771 and days following, no. 257); John Hope [1737-1784], Amsterdam;^[2] his estate, Amsterdam and London; by inheritance to his

youngest son, Henry Philip Hope [1774-1839], London;[3] by inheritance to his nephew, Henry Thomas Hope [1808-1862], London and Deepdene, near Dorking, Surrey;[4] by inheritance to his widow, Adèle Hope Bichat [d. 1884], London and Deepdene; by inheritance to her grandson, Henry Francis Hope Pelham-Clinton-Hope, 8th duke of Newcastle-under-Lyme [1866-1941], London, Deepdene, and Clumber Park, Nottingham.[5] (Galerie Charles Brunner, Paris), by 1923.[6] Mme G. Brière, 1928. acquired c. 1930 by private collection, Paris; by descent in this family;[7] (sale, Sotheby's, New York, 23 January 2003, no. 21, as *A Still Life of Game by a Stone Monument, including, a Swan, a Hare, Game Birds, a Spaniel, a Jay and a Pigeon in Flight, an Extensive Water Garden Beyond*, bought in); purchased 10 March 2004 by NGA by private contract with (Sotheby's).

[1] Gerard Hoet, *Catalogus of naamlyst van schilderyen, met derzelver pryzen*. . . 3 vols., The Hague, 1752: 2:511.

[2] For a detailed account of the Hope Collection and the family history, see J.W. Niemeijer, "De kunstverzameling van John Hope (1737-1784)," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 32 (1981): 127-232; see also Marten G. Buist, *At Spes Non Fracta: Hope & Co. 1770–1815: Merchant Bankers and Diplomats at Work*, The Hague, 1974: 42-43, 49. John Hope's estate, which was left to his three sons--Thomas (1769-1831), Adrian Elias (1772-1834) and Henry Philip (1774-1839)--was administered by the children's mother, Philippina Barbara van der Hoeven and their father's cousin, Henry Hope (c. 1739-1811), who ran the family firm. After the mother's death in 1789, Henry Hope assumed control of the collection of paintings in Amsterdam. In 1791 the three sons received the division of their mother's estate and a partial division of their father's estate. The collection of paintings was not divided, however, but remained in the estate. On 18 June 1794, Thomas Hope, having attained his legal majority, received his inheritance, but he received no part of the collection, which continued to remain in his father's estate, and which was taken by Henry Hope to London in 1794 when he and other members of the family fled the invading French army. In London, Henry Hope maintained possession of the collection, and on 17 December 1795 he signed insurance lists of "Pictures in the House No. 1 the corner of Harley Street, belonging to Mr. Henry Hope."

[3] It is not clear when, and for what reason, Henry Philip Hope became the sole heir of the paintings, but he seems to have inherited the collection no later than

1819. After Henry Hope's death in 1811, possession of the collection presumably went to Thomas Hope, with whom it remained because of Henry Philip Hope's peripatetic life (see: Niemeijer 1981, 169). Thomas kept most of the paintings in his two London residences; first at 2, Hanover Square and, after 1819, off Portland Place in Duchess Street, where he designed and built a special gallery to house the collection (see: David Watkin, *Thomas Hope 1769-1831 and the Neo-Classical Idea*, London, 1968: 93). NGA 2004.39.1 was seen in Thomas Hope's cabinet by C.M. Westmacott (*British Galleries of Painting and Sculpture...*, London, 1824: 237).

[4] Henry Thomas Hope maintained the property and its collections on Duchess Street until 1851, when he moved to a new residence in Piccadilly (see: Niemeijer 1981, 170; and Ben Broos et al., *Great Dutch Paintings from America*, exh. cat., Mauritshuis, The Hague; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, The Hague, 1990: 422.)

[5] Lord Pelham-Clinton-Hope lent the painting to the South Kensington Museum in London from 1891 to 1898. The 2003 Sotheby's sale catalogue indicates that the painting was sold at a Christie, Manson & Woods sale in London, 25-27 July 1917, as lot no. 292. However, this sale (one of several Hope sales in 1917) was a sale of the Hope library, and lot no. 292 was a book by Sir H.C. Englefield, *Walk through Southampton*. The Hope sale at Christie's on 20 July 1917, of "pictures by old masters and family portraits," included only 127 lots and no painting by Weenix is listed in the catalogue.

[6] The date is according to a photograph in the Witt Library fiche. There is a red wax seal on the reverse of the painting's stretcher, embossed "GALERIE BRUNNER."

[7] According to the provenance in the 2003 Sotheby's sale catalogue.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1891 Pictures of the Dutch and Flemish Schools lent to the South Kensington Museum by Lord Francis Pelham-Clinton-Hope, South Kensington Museum, London, 1891, no. 46.

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