

## Still Life with a Chinese Bowl, a Nautilus Cup and Other Objects

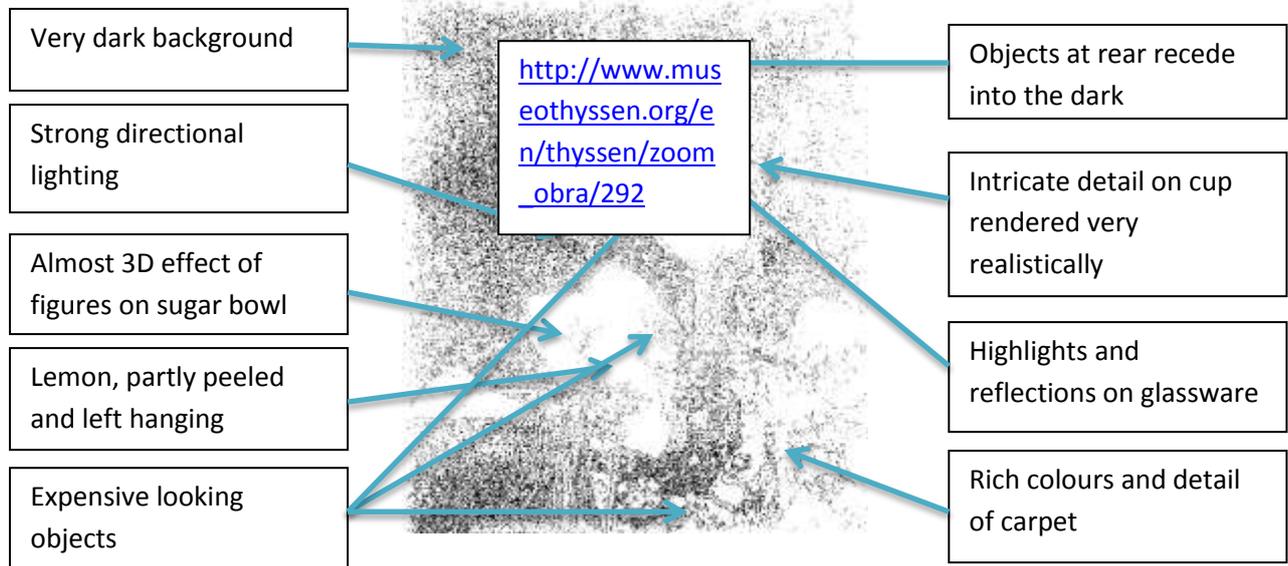


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### *Details*

*Artist:* Willem Kalf (1619-1693)

*Date of painting:* 1662

*Size:* 79.4 x 67.3 cm

*Oil on canvas*

*Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid*

### **Description**

The painting is a still-life of a few objects on the corner of a table. What makes it different from other still life paintings I have seen is the expensive nature of the objects and the strong directional lighting.

A sugar bowl, an intricate cup and a wine glass are depicted standing on a table together with a ruffled carpet, an orange and a part peeled lemon. Other objects are also visible in the painting. All are painted in a very realistic manner and with great attention to detail. The different textures of the carpet and the porcelain being equally well painted.

Strong directional light picks out the sugar bowl, fruit and cup, but allows other objects to recede into the darker background.

Reflections and glimmers of light are rendered very well in the painting.

Studying the composition of the scene, the objects are arranged in a triangular shape with the main items placed on the horizontal and vertical thirds.

## Interpretation

Kalf was a leading painter of still-life in 17<sup>th</sup> century Holland. His style is called Pronkstilleven, which the National Gallery website defines as “meaning 'ostentatious still life' and referring to the display of lavish man-made objects.”

One of the striking features of the painting is the lighting. It comes strongly from one side but fades rapidly to the background. The sharp yellow of the lemon contrasts with the soft red glow

of the contents of the glass in the background. The Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza website comments “The light used by the artist is soft and graduated, enveloping the objects while also revealing them to the viewer. Kalf paid great attention to the highlights and interplay of reflections between the objects, achieving a precise analysis of light and the effects of colour”.

Kalf’s ability to paint objects with completely different textures, such as a carpet and a porcelain bowl, making both come alive in the painting is remarkable.

## Evaluation

Kalf produced many paintings in this Pronkstilleven style. Some of the elegant objects appear in several of his paintings. As well as being a painter Kalf was also an art dealer so these are possibly objects that passed through his possession at the time.

There may be a hidden meaning to this painting, according to the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza “The inclusion of sweet citrus fruits such as oranges and bitter ones such as lemon may refer, in combination with the wine, to temperance and moderation”.

KIERS and TISSINK (2000 p188) comment on Kalf’s “ability to render the various materials with the appropriate transparency and lustre” while SLIVE (1995 p287) considers that Kalf combines “Rembrandt’s rich and expressive chiaroscuro with Vermeer’s exquisite sense of colour”.

This is an excellent example of a particular style of still-life, one of many produced by Kalf. The Encyclopaedia Britannica states “Though his still lifes followed an established formula, Kalf greatly enriched the genre with his use of simple composition, dark background, and acutely perceived highlights. In restraint and richness of texture, Kalf’s still lifes were seldom, if ever, matched”.



## References

Chilvers, I. (2009) Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Kiers, J and Tissink, F. (2000) The Golden Age of Dutch Art. London: Thames and Hudson

Slive, S. (1995) Dutch Painting 1600-1800. New Haven: Yale University Press

## Website References

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<http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/willem-kalf>

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## Image Reference

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