

Basic Detail Report



Vanitas

Date

ca. 1650

Primary Maker

David Bailly

Medium

Oil on canvas

Description

David Bailly Dutch, 1584–1657 Vanitas Still Life with Portrait, ca. 1650 Oil on canvas 35 x 45 inches Gift of Louis V. Keeler, Class of 1911, and Mrs. Keeler, by exchange 86.006 Bailly's painting also reflects the rise of Dutch global trade, in both direct and nuanced ways. The tulips at the center of the picture, about which the Dutch were—and are—notoriously passionate, were imports from Turkey during the sixteenth century. But items from far further afield are here as well, like the tobacco resting in a piece of folded paper at left, a key Dutch import from its American colony of New Netherland (now New York State). When this painting was made, the Dutch were the brokers of tobacco to the world. Smoking here is presented as one of the earthly pleasures that can distract the pious from meditation on the hereafter. The presence of the seashell, an *Oliva* sp. from the Indian Ocean, is intended to scold wealthy collectors of rare and expensive seashells for their frivolity. But at the same time, it is also a symbol of pride in the reach of Dutch trade to the Far East. Perhaps the most important—and the most complex—aspect of the picture is the dark-skinned young man at right, holding a portrait miniature of the presumed patron of the painting. On one level, his presence announces the prominent role of the Dutch in the West African slave trade. However, slavery was only legal in the Dutch territories, and not at home in the Netherlands. Also, the gold chain around his neck identifies him as a trusted servant in a household, rather than a slave. Whatever Bailly's reason for including him, it is clear that Dutch global trade had a profound effect not only on the movement of goods, but on the homogeneity of Dutch society at this time. (Andrew C. Weislogel, "The New and Unknown World: Art, Exploration, and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age," catalogue accompanying an exhibition organized by the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, curated by Andrew C. Weislogel and presented at the Johnson Museum August 13–October 2, 2011) -Felt it was too much text for Label Copy

Dimensions

Image: 35 x 45 inches (88.9 x 114.3 cm); Frame (slightly irregular): 48 1/4 x 58 3/8 x 4 inches (122.6 x 148.3 x 10.2 cm)