

# Dead Standing Things



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Dead Standing Things  
Still Life Painting in Britain 1660–1740

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Cover image: Charles Collins *Lobster on a Delft Dish* (detail) 1738 Tate

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## Still Life Painting in Britain 1660–1740

A familiar genre today, still life painting was established as an art form in Britain in the late seventeenth century. Like the majority of British art from this period, the genre was introduced through the work and influence of incomer artists, largely from the Netherlands. Still life painting had emerged there in the earlier part of the century, characterised by the detailed depiction of inanimate objects including fruit, flowers, dead game and jewels. It proved to be a successful new art form in the work of artists such as Willem Claesz Heda (1594–c.1680), Jan Davidsz de Heem (1606–1684) and Willem Kalf (1619–1693), but was considered the lowest in the hierarchy of painting by connoisseurs and critics as it did not depict human emotions.

As the market in the Low Countries became increasingly saturated with still life paintings and the economic conditions in the Netherlands began to decline, Dutch artists travelled to Britain to seek new opportunities and consumers for their work. At the same time the old system of artistic patronage dominated by the wealthy elite was being augmented by newly emerging auctions, providing new opportunities for lesser known artists to sell their work. An increasing population of a 'middling' professional class began buying art to furnish their houses as part of their social advancement, the still life paintings of luxury goods reflecting their ambitions and aspirations.

### Early origins

A few early examples of still life painting in Britain can be found in the first half of the seventeenth century. The English gentleman, gardener and amateur artist Nathaniel Bacon (1585–1627) produced a series of kitchen scenes in the 1620s, including his *Cookmaid with Still Life of Vegetables and Fruit* (Tate), which depicts a buxom maid servant with an extensive still life arrangement of fruit and vegetables. The artist's knowledge of and proficiency in the genre almost certainly derived from his extensive travel in the Low Countries.

The first Dutch still life painter of note to practice in Britain was Johannes Torrentius (1589–1644). Having been imprisoned in Haarlem for heresy and immorality, his freedom was secured by the British envoy Dudley Carleton, acting on behalf of Charles I. Torrentius was subsequently brought to London in 1630 to work at the royal court, but unfortunately none of his works from this period survive. An earlier work however, *Emblematic still life with flagon, glass, jug and bridle* (Rijksmuseum), dated 1614, carries the cipher of Charles I on its reverse indicating that it was once owned by the monarch.



Pieter van Roestraten *Porringer, German Cup and Oysters* c.1680 Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Another Dutch painter, Simon Luttichuys (1610–1661), is also recorded as active in England around this time, before moving back to the Netherlands in the 1640s. Born in London to Dutch parents and brought up as a child in the Netherlands, Luttichuys was well regarded for his still life painting by an early English commentator, William Sanderson, who recognised him by the anglicised name of ‘Littlehouse’. However, the only recorded painting from Luttichuys’s English period is a portrait of Bishop Thomas Morton at St. John’s College, Cambridge, dating from 1637/8.

### Popularity under Roestraten and Collier

The popularity of still life painting grew rapidly in the years following the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. The first significant painter of still life active in Britain was Pieter van Roestraten (1630–1700). Born in Haarlem, he trained in Amsterdam under Frans Hals from 1651–56, marrying his master’s daughter Adriaentje. Roestraten moved to London with his wife probably at some point between 1663 and 1666, settling in James Street, Covent Garden. Roestraten’s artistic training had been as a portrait painter, although he also produced genre scenes before concentrating on the still life paintings for which he is best known today. His decision to focus on still life may be explained in part by a contemporary account claiming that Sir Peter Lely, the leading portrait painter at the court, offered to introduce Roestraten to the king on the condition that he agree to not practice portrait painting in Britain.

Roestraten is particularly noted for his depictions of silverware, in which one or two prime objects are shown in realistic detail. The objects we see displayed in Roestraten’s works may have belonged to wealthy families who commissioned the artist to paint a ‘portrait’ of the object, thus displaying and commemorating their own wealth and prosperity. As the taking of tea became increasingly fashionable among the wealthy in the later 1680s and 1690s, tea pots, tea canisters, porcelain cups, sugar and spices associated with the new beverage also became a regular feature of Roestraten’s compositions. A notable British painter contemporary to Roestraten and producing work in a similar manner is Robert Robinson (1651–1706). Though catalogue sales from the period list scores of still life paintings by Robinson, only one has recently come to light. The mezzotints he produced, however, give a tantalising indication of what the paintings may have been like.



Edward Collier *Still Life with a Volume of Wither's 'Emblemes'* 1696 Tate

Another significant still life painter to arrive in Britain from the Netherlands was Edward Collier (c.1642–1708). Little for certain is known about Collier's early life, though it is likely that he was born around 1642 in the town of Breda in the Netherlands. Collier probably trained in Haarlem before he settled in Leiden in 1667, producing works under variants of his Dutch name including 'Edwaert Colyer' and 'Evert Kollier'. He is recorded as leaving for London in May 1693 with his wife, thereafter producing works with his anglicised name and often signing his pictures, 'Mr. E. Collier, painter at London'. Collier is best known for still lifes featuring a range of objects including globes, books, musical instruments and jewellery, piled together in sumptuous displays of wealth. These worldly extravagances are often juxtaposed with signifiers of man's mortality and the passing of time – *memento mori* – making them *vanitas* still lifes. Collier also produced *trompe l'oeil* still life pictures of letter racks on wooden boards. These follow in the style of works by Cornelis Gijsbrechts (d.1675) and Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627-78), who produced a few *trompe l'oeil* letter rack paintings during his time in England (1662-66). Quills, letters, knives, sealing wax and newspapers are the common features of these compositions, with the objects arranged hanging on a wooden board and held in place with strips of material. Collier's *trompe l'oeil* paintings reveal the impressive skill of an artist who can 'trick the eye' of the viewer into believing they are looking at the real thing.



Edward Collier *Trompe l'Oeil with Writing Materials* c.1702 Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Still life painters often had 'stock' objects that they would use (and reuse) in their paintings, and Collier is no exception in this. But one distinguishing feature of Collier's work is the way he produced multiple versions of the same painting. For example, his *Still Life with a globe* (Tate) is repeated in many different renderings using the same objects with just the slightest amendment to the composition in each picture. This suggests that Collier is not painting to commission for a specific patron but producing work to sell speculatively on the newly emerging art market in London. Auction sales of paintings had been established in the Netherlands for some time, but only started to occur regularly in Britain from the late 1680s. At this time coffee houses, taverns and commercial exchanges began to hold sales where pictures could be purchased by a more general audience. Once an artist like Collier had settled on a successful composition he could produce a number of similar pictures for sale in the weekly auctions, where the cheaper and less high-brow genre of still life was more affordable to the new 'middling class' of art buyers.



Opportunities for selling works at auction may help to explain the large numbers of works produced in this period in 'the manner' of Roestraten and Collier, not painted by the artists themselves. The identity of the artists producing these works remains unknown, leading the Dutch art historian Dr. Fred Meijer to label those following Roestraten as the 'Pseudo Roestraten'. Were these painters studio assistants working with the Dutch artists, or independent artists taking advantage of the popular appeal of the genre? The lack of surviving information from the period makes it hard to tell. One possible candidate for producing work in the manner of Roestraten is the obscure painter Goddard Dunning (c.1614 – c.1678). Dunning's *Self Portrait, aged 64, with Still Life* (The National Trust, Blickling Hall) contains a number of objects which closely resemble those found in a Roestraten composition. Another intriguing figure is Parry Walton (fl.c.1660–1702), a dealer, restorer, copyist and still life painter. The only surviving painting attributed to Walton is the *Still Life* in the Dulwich Picture Gallery collection (illustrated on page 32). The attribution to Walton comes from the original inventory of the Cartwright collection, which was bequeathed to Dulwich College in 1686. However, in appearance this painting closely resembles the work of Simon Luttichuys, making it possible that Walton copied an earlier (now unknown) composition by the Dutch artist.

## Developments in flower painting

Flower painting is an important sub-genre of still life painting and also started to be practised in Britain during this period. The merchant, plantsman and self-taught painter Alexander Marshal (c.1620–1682) is best known for his *Florilegium* (1660s–1682), a collection of studies of plants and flowers in watercolour and gouache, as well as other studies of birds and insects in watercolour. However, Marshal also experimented with still life paintings in oil, with two works of this nature known to survive including his *Flowers in a Delft Jar* from 1663 (Yale Center for British Art).

The first significant painter of flowers in oil active in Britain was Simon Verelst (1644 – c.1717). Born in The Hague into a family of painters, Verelst had moved to London by 1669. Pepys recorded visiting him on 11 April of that year, with the artist trying to sell him a 'little flower-pot of his doing' for £70. Verelst's floral arrangements of roses, tulips, poppies and sunflowers followed in the Dutch tradition of flower painting, the artist establishing himself as a very successful and expensive painter. Yet, the British preference for portraiture and Verelst's desire for patronage from the royal court meant he soon began painting portraits, becoming best known for his images of Nell Gwyn, the mistress of Charles II.



Simon Verelst *Vase of flowers* The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

In a number of these portraits Verelst still managed to showcase his skill as a painter of flowers by including floral arrangements within the portrait setting, such as his *Mary of Modena*, c.1680 (Yale Center for British Art). Unfortunately, in the 1680s Verelst seems to have suffered a mental breakdown which affected the nature of his painting thereafter. He struggled to maintain the success he had previously enjoyed and by 1710 was living in reduced circumstances.

Verelst's position as the leading flower painter was further challenged with the arrival of the French artist Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer (1636–1699). Born in Lille he had probably studied in Antwerp before establishing himself in Paris as the leading flower painter, where his works were collected in large number by Louis XIV. His large-scale compositions of flowers were considered so life-like that all they lacked was the scent. In 1690 Monnoyer was persuaded by Ralph Montagu, later 1st Duke of Montagu, to come to England. Commissions followed for Montagu House, Burlington House and Kensington Palace, as well as contributions of the floral elements for portraits by Godfrey Kneller. Known to his British clients as 'Baptiste', the artist died in London in 1699. His son Antoine (1672–1747) had worked with him on his British commissions, but later travelled in Europe.

Another figure to arrive in London at this time was the Hungarian artist Jakob Bogdany (1660–1724). Trained in Amsterdam, Bogdany was in London by 1688, writing in a letter in 1691 that, '[I] paint the Spring flowers & in the Somer flowers & fruit when they are out Lobsters and oyster pieces. In the Winter pieces of Fowell & plate'. The artist found favour with aristocratic patrons, receiving commissions to produce decorative pictures for Chatsworth House among other country seats. He also provided a set of flower pieces for the 'Looking Glass Closet of the Thames Gallery' at Hampton Court for Mary II, as well as commissions for William III. His success enabled him to buy property in Finchley, Spalding and Hitchin, where he was Lord of the Manor. After the death of Bogdany the Flemish artist Peter Casteels (1684–1749) became the leading exponent of flower painting in Britain, having arrived in England from Antwerp in 1708.

### Scottish painters of still life

One prominent British artist active in still life painting in this period was William Gow Ferguson (c.1633–after 1695). Presumed to have been born in Scotland, Ferguson spent his active life as a painter in the Netherlands, settling in Amsterdam. He specialised in arrangements of dead birds and animals – the 'gamepiece' – which had a long association with the city, particularly through



Thomas Warrender *Still Life* 1708 Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh

the work of Willem van Aelst (1627–1683). Though based on the Continent, Ferguson's works were acquired by British collectors: a number of his paintings are recorded as sold at auction in Edinburgh in 1693, making it possible that the artist was painting specifically for auction sales in Britain.

It may have been through the Edinburgh sales that the Scottish artist Thomas Warrender (fl.1673–1713) became aware of the work of Edward Collier. Warrender's *Still Life* of 1708 (National Gallery of Scotland) owes a great deal to the *trompe l'oeil* letter racks that Collier produced in great number while in London. In his own work Warrender has added a more overt and specific political reference, namely to the Union of Scotland and England in 1707 which is signified through his inclusion of playing cards with the two royal coats of arms joined together and the depiction of a Presbyterian pamphlet, suggesting how the dangers of Popery would be curbed by the Union. Another Scottish painter working in still life at this time was Richard Waitt (fl.1708–32). Waitt was proficient in many genres of painting, but one of his most notable compositions is a stark arrangement of a leg of lamb, bread and cauliflowers from 1724 (National Gallery of Scotland). The survival of this sole impressive still life work suggests that he may have produced other paintings in the genre.

### Still life from the 18th century to today

Migrants from the Low Countries practising still life continued to arrive in England in the 1720s. Pieter Rysbrack (c.1684–1748), the elder brother of the celebrated sculptor Michael Rysbrack (1694–1770), presumably came to London from Antwerp with his sibling in 1720. Pieter Rysbrack is best known for his panoramic landscapes, but also painted still life arrangements of dead game. The youngest Rysbrack, Gerard (1696–1773), joined his brothers in London later in the 1720s and also painted gamepieces. The influence of these migrant artists began to tell as British-born painters of still life began to emerge. For example, Edward Langton (fl.1737–1751) had been trained by Pieter Rysbrack and followed him as a painter of dead game. Conversely, little is known of the early life or training of the Irish-born painter Charles Collins (c.1680–1744). Collins often worked in watercolour, but is perhaps best known for his series of oil paintings depicting British birds in a landscape setting. Nine of the original set of twelve exist at Anglesey Abbey (The National Trust) near Cambridge. Collins also produced still life arrangements in oil, including his *Lobster on a Delft Dish* from 1738 (Tate).

The practice of still life painting continued in Britain into the eighteenth century through the impact of migrant artists such as the Van der Mijl family, but also increasingly through British-born practitioners including Thomas Keyse (1720–1800), William Jones (fl.1764–77), Charles Lewis (1753–94) and George Smith of Chichester (1714–1776). The coach painter turned still life flower painter John Baker (1736–1771) was a founder member of the Royal Academy. Although still life painting was to remain a relatively lowly and unappreciated genre in the eyes of some connoisseurs and critics, it proved an accessible and popular form which provided opportunities for aspiring female painters and through which amateur artists were able to practice the art of painting. Still life features in most British art movements up to the present day. Modern painters of still life include Ben Nicholson, Mary Fedden and Patrick Caulfield, the genre being constantly reinterpreted by artists in different ways for contemporary audiences and consumers.

### Tim Batchelor



Charles Collins *Lobster on a Delft Dish* 1738 Tate





Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer *Still life of mixed flowers in a vase on a ledge* The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

## From 'dead-standing-things' to 'still life' A new genre in British art

### Defining 'still life'

In 1658, the author William Sanderson writing in *Graphice. The use of pen and pencil. Or, the most excellent art of painting* drew attention to some artists of 'Particular Masterie':

For *Flower-pots* and Paintings of that kind, *Brugel* and *Dehem* were excellent: but now *Paulus Seagers* is best of all, a rare Artizan, and *Van Thewlin of Antwerpe*, his Imitator.

And in dead-standing-things, *Little-House*, a *Dutchman*.

By '*Little-House*' Sanderson here refers to Simon Luttichuys, an artist born in 1610 to Dutch parents living in London. Luttichuys went on to work primarily as a painter of still life subjects, but over time his name and works have become little known in Britain. Sanderson's reference suggests this was not always the case, but more importantly it draws our attention to wider ideas about still life painting as a genre at this time.

Sanderson does not use the term 'still life' when referring to the type of painting produced by Luttichuys, rather employing the term 'dead-standing-things'. Quite simply, this is because the term did not yet exist, and the genre now known as still life had yet to receive a recognisable English name.

In describing the still life genre as 'dead-standing-things', Sanderson's writing looks to the Continent for guidance. In the first half of the century the Dutch referred to still life works as '*stilstaende dingen*', which today translates as 'still-standing things'. It was only from 1650 onwards that the modern Dutch term '*stilleven*' was introduced, meaning 'inanimate object' or 'immobile nature'. Similarly in France the term '*choses inanimées*' meaning 'inanimate things' was used to describe still life subjects, but in Italian the name for the genre was somewhat different - '*natura morta*' translating as 'dead nature'. The French term then changed to '*nature morte*' at the end of the eighteenth century, a description still used for the genre today. Sanderson's ambiguous term 'dead-standing-things' appears to be cobbled together from these various foreign sources, exemplifying how attempts to define the discussion of painting in England trailed behind examples already being set in Continental Europe.



As the century progressed, Sanderson's effort to describe the genre was forgotten as English writers came to adopt the Dutch term 'stilleven', directly translating this into English as 'still life'.

### The artistic value of still life

In 1685 William Aglionby suggested in his *Painting Illustrated* (1685) that still life subjects should be valued less than portraits of people, "because those things are but the still Life, whereas there is a Spirit in Flesh and Blood, which is hard to Represent." This pejorative opinion of the genre was addressed again by Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury in his *Judgment of Hercules* (1713), where he described still life as "the last and lowest degree of Painting." In 1719 the artist Jonathan Richardson expanded on Shaftesbury's curt statement, suggesting in his *Two Discourses* that,

A History is preferable to a Landscape, Sea-piece, Animals, Fruit, Flowers, or any other Still-Life, pieces of Drollery, &c.; the reason is, the latter Kinds may Please, and in proportion as they do so they are Estimable, and that is according to every one's Taste, but they cannot Improve the Mind, they excite no Noble Sentiments.

Richardson's comments – like those of Aglionby and Shaftesbury – follow the academic tradition that came out of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in the second half of the seventeenth century. The French Academy's educational practices and published writings established a hierarchy of value given to the different genres of art. Mythological, historical, or Biblical subjects were the most valued; next came portraits and painted scenes from everyday life, followed by landscapes. Below this was still life painting, which was seen as the artistic genre of the least merit since it was regarded as a mere recording of inanimate objects. The Academy's views were frequently adopted in art writing of the period across Europe well into the eighteenth century, profoundly affecting critical characterisations of still life as a genre.

### The growing value of still life painting

While influential, the judgements made by the French Academy on the value of still life painting were subject to constant dispute and redefinition. Indeed, the ways in which the Academy's views on still life were interpreted and contested in England was crucial to the development of a new discernibly British identity for still life painting. For example, the negative ideas associated with still life painting in contemporary writing about art does not reflect the realities of the art marketplace. From the 1680s, we can trace a surge in the number of still life



Edward Collier *An Allegory of Wealth and Temporal Power: a vanitas still life of court jewels in a casket, a globe, sword, and a miniature of Charles I, all resting on a cloth covered table* 1705 Private collection

paintings recorded in British collections, auctions and inventories that testifies to a growing appreciation for the genre.

According to the famous engraver and antiquary George Vertue, the still life paintings of the artist Simon Verelst fetched prices which were 'the greatest that had been known in this country.' Similarly, the art writer Bainbrigg Buckeridge noted that the flower paintings of the artist John-Baptiste Monnoyer bore 'a good Price suitable to their great Worth.'

Vertue's and Buckeridge's comments highlight the different ways value is attributed to art. Here, the value of still life can be measured through its ability to attract high market prices, but this view sits at odds with the ideas of the French Academy who attributed a low value to the genre because of its failure to provide moral instruction or to reflect wider worldly concerns. However influential artistic criticism may have been in this period then, it seems clear that English art lovers and collectors did not always share the tastes and views of the critics.

**Caroline Good**



Edward Collier *Still Life* 1699 Tate

## Worldly Goods

The jewels, precious metals, fine ornaments and luxury goods that form the content of many still life paintings by artists like Collier and Roestraten convey a distinct impression of prosperity defined by material wealth. However, the globes that are often to be found among such assemblages remind us of the patterns of trade, exploration and colonisation that underpinned so much of this material culture throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. During this period, an increasing volume of the wealth of the new world fell into the hands of the British, and a whole range of new and exciting types of merchandise became increasingly available – not just for the aristocracy, but also a nascent mercantile class whose fortunes were often made, either directly or indirectly, as a result of oceanic trade.

Teapots from the Far East, precious stones and metals from the mines of Africa, tulips from the Ottoman Empire, and silver vessels modelled by Europe's finest craftsmen, reveal the sheer diversity of this trade. These objects shed light on the extraordinary extent to which distant and often unfamiliar cultures influenced British taste. Similarly, the letters, manuscripts and printed texts which frequently share pictorial spaces with such goods reflect the role of written communication and correspondence in the development of international trade and commerce.

The fact that many of the leading still life painters in London at this time were of Dutch origin is not inconsequential. During the middle decades of the seventeenth century, the Dutch seaborne empire had become the wealthiest and most powerful in the world. The commissioning of still life paintings by those who enjoyed the fruits of this success contributed in large part to the rise of artists like Collier and Roestraten, who were able to make a living by specialising in the genre. However, as the post-Restoration years saw an increasingly prosperous British oceanic trade coincide with the decline of Dutch imperial fortunes, the market for still life painting in Britain began to grow, prompting émigré artists from the Low Countries to relocate to London in search of new patrons. In time, as imperialism became as much a hallmark of British society as it had been of Dutch, the visual association between material wealth and global trade became an increasingly common symbol in British still life painting.

**Peter Moore**

# Vanitas

Still life paintings often feature displays of expensive luxury goods such as silver and jewellery, and suggest the excesses of human pleasure through music, food and wine. However, this ostentation is frequently tempered by the inclusion of the *vanitas* motif – symbols or phrases that refer to the transience of time, the futility of worldly wealth and the mortality of human existence. The word *vanitas* derives from the Latin term for vanity or emptiness, and many still life painters actively engaged with this motif in their work.

The ‘*vanitas* still life’ is a particularly prominent feature in the work of Edward Collier. The artist used (and re-used) many stock *vanitas* symbols and mottos in his pictures. For example, Collier’s series of paintings of a *Still Life* with a globe present the aphorism *Vita Brevis Ars Longa* (life is brief, art endures), which is written on a piece of paper and shown prominently in the foreground of the composition. This is accompanied by the more subtle symbol of mortality in a candle whose flame has just expired, signifying the brevity of life by showing how that which burns bright can be extinguished at any time.

Collier’s *Still Life with a Volume of Wither’s ‘Emblemes’* incorporates far clearer *vanitas* symbols, which occupy the shadowy background of the top left-hand corner of the painting. Pictured are a human skull and a funerary urn, the latter holding in place a piece of paper with a written Biblical warning taken from

Ecclesiastes: *Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas* (vanity of vanities, all is vanity). The painting also includes an hour-glass on the table which holds the running sands of time, tellingly placed next to a casket of jewels. The book of Wither’s *Emblemes* is shown open on a page with the text: ‘What I WAS, is passed by; What I AM, away doth Flie; What I SHALL BEE, none do see; Yet, in that, my beauties bee.’ Collier portrays this emblem opposite the frontispiece of the book to heighten ideas of *vanitas* in the painting.

Other similar *vanitas* phrases appear across Collier’s works, including the aphorisms *Memento Mori* (remember death), *Sic transit gloria mundi* (like this the glory of the world passes by) and *Nemo ante mortem beatus dici potest* (no one can call himself blessed before death). The meaning of these phrases is clear and needs little contextualisation. However, elsewhere Collier chooses to give a phrase such as *Finis Coronat Opus* (the end crowns the work) extra emphasis by accompanying it with crown and jewels.

The idea of *vanitas* can also be applied to flower paintings – expensive and beautiful flowers which will soon fade and die. Some of the flowers depicted in a floral arrangement may be shown as just turning past their best, entering into the process of death and decay: thus, withering petals and brown crumbling leaves become a reminder of the passing of time.



Edward Collier *An Allegory of Wealth and Temporal Power: a vanitas still life of court jewels in a casket, a globe, sword, and a miniature of Charles I, all resting on a cloth covered table* (detail) 1705 Private collection

While some flower paintings have obvious *vanitas* symbolism, for others where there are no immediate signs *vanitas* may not be the main intention of the artist – yet it remains a feature of them nonetheless. The presence, sometimes, of a pocket watch on a ledge by a flower vase may also be read as a *vanitas* symbol.

**Tim Batchelor**



Edward Collier *Still Life* (detail) 1699 Tate



Edward Collier *Still Life with a Volume of Wither's 'Emblemes'* (detail) 1696 Tate



# Music

The motifs of music – instruments, performance situations and notation – were particularly popular inclusions within still life paintings of the seventeenth century and most enduringly perhaps in the *vanitas* still life. Music's dualities – sacred and secular, courtly and sensual, soothing and arousing, for the learned and the foolish – fit seamlessly into the repertoire of those objects which allowed man to reflect on spiritual and earthly life and ultimately choose between them. The depiction of instruments, or of music in the form of notation, captured on canvas that which was ethereal – the sight of sound.

Collier, was among those artists for whom musical representation could be taken beyond the generality of the moralising emblems to lead into a more finely-nuanced reading of a painting. The book of emblems represented in Collier's *Still Life with a Volume of Wither's 'Emblemes'* berates fickle women for being swayed by the vanity of a 'fiddle-flicke' or tempted by a 'Galliard or a Song' (though this particular text is not shown in the painting).

The two examples of musical notation in this *Still Life* are not accurately rendered, particularly when compared to some of his other paintings which incorporate well-known melodies such as Jacob van Eyck's *Tanneken* or Playford's *Grenadier's March*. It is the idea of the permanence of printed music (capturing the ephemeral) to which Collier wishes to draw our attention. The voice being captured in the notation is a male voice – as

shown by the indication 'tenor' on the main notation in the open book, and the position of this fragment behind a bass stringed instrument. This is the voice echoed in the printed book: George Wither remarks in his 'Author's Meditation' that the only way to ensure an accurate memory remains is for one to preserve one's own likeness.

The instruments in the painting range from the relatively modern to the decidedly old-fashioned. The worm-eaten cittern and snapped violin string are recognisable ways in which the artist symbolises both decay and disruption. In this way Collier uses the instruments to show the passing of time both in terms of their age and musical sound. Yet their permanence as objects counteracts the impermanence of sound.

## Debra Pring



Edward Collier *Still Life with a Volume of Wither's 'Emblemes'* (details)  
1696 Tate







Edward Collier A Trompe l'Oeil of Newspapers, Letters and Writing Implements on a Wooden Board c.1699 Tate

## The Trompe l'Oeil Letter Rack

The advent of email has meant that letters have now lost the status and importance they held for centuries as the foremost medium of communication. At the turn of the eighteenth century, the letter was not only understood as a practical means of correspondence, but as an object that could symbolise friendship, learning, status and an engagement with contemporary politics and society. Thanks to these multiple associations, letters attracted new attention from artists who began producing still life paintings of letter racks in the seventeenth century.

The works on display here by Edward Collier and Thomas Warrander employ the artistic device of *trompe l'oeil* ('trick of the eye') to portray letter racks, seemingly constructed out of red straps tightly pinned to a backboard and stuffed with a range of letters, writing implements, printed works and other personal paraphernalia, such as combs, pipes and bells. These objects convey the idea that the owner of a painting such as this was a true 'man of letters', occupied not only with personal correspondence but engaging widely with the world around him. In this way, these paintings show how people used still life painting to project a particular image of themselves, as a form of self-fashioning.

The impressive attention to detail found in these *trompe l'oeil* letter racks, from the tools of writing to the dates included on gazettes and pamphlets, presents the idea that

their contents are personal and specific to their owners. But this is yet another artistic device. For when several of Collier's *trompe l'oeil* letter racks are viewed together, it is clear that the artist repeatedly used the same objects, altering only small details that were necessary to keep his paintings up to date. Such repetition enabled Collier to produce *trompe l'oeil* letter racks like these on a large scale, feeding a demand for his works on the English art market. Approximately sixty variant letter rack paintings by Collier survive, and this is testament both to his abilities as a professional artist and to the popularity of his work. Instead of signing their works, both Collier and Warrander include letters in these paintings that are addressed to themselves. This adds to the sense of illusion, and in Collier's case may have also served as a means of self-advertisement.

**Claudine van Hensbergen**

# Silver

In the period following the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 there was a resurgence in the manufacture of silverware in England. Large quantities of silver objects had been melted down in the 1640s to fund the civil wars, but with the arrival of Charles II and the lavish Stuart court the general expenditure on silver rose rapidly. Wealthy families and companies took the opportunity to replace lost items with fashionable new styles, and developments in the culture of dining and the introduction of imported foodstuffs meant a greater number and variety of implements was required. Highly skilled goldsmiths from the Continent such as Wolfgang Howzer (from Zurich) and Jacob Bodendick (from Limburg) were welcomed at court. These migrant craftsmen were later joined by a wave of Huguenot (French Protestant) refugees fleeing persecution following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Practitioners such as Pierre Platel, Paul Crespin and Paul de Lamerie had a huge impact on the production of silver in England into the early eighteenth century. Despite these developments the core functions of silver remained: both as a practical tool, and as a statement of wealth and social status.

Two-handled cups in silver – known as porringers – can be seen prominently displayed in the still life paintings of Roestraten and Collier. These personal eating vessels were originally used for the consumption of wet foodstuffs such as stew or soup,

but also for the taking of alcoholic mixtures. As their everyday use declined, porringers took on a new status as gifts given to mark special occasions such as a christening or an act of service to the Crown.

Roestraten's *Still Life with a Porringer, German Cup and Oysters* and Collier's *Still Life with a Volume of Wither's 'Emblemes'* both portray porringers with an intricate repeating floral design around the base. Collier presents the cup alongside grapes and wine, representing alcoholic pleasure in his *vanitas* still life. Roestraten shows the cup next to a larger central object, a German tinned and gilt copper two-handled cup dating from the mid-seventeenth century. Roestraten's porringer is lying on its side, displaying a provincial English mark.

Roestraten depicts many other decorative silver objects in his works. His *Still Life with Silver Candlestick* (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam) includes an ornate candlestick that has been identified as by the London goldsmith Anthony Nelme, dated 1694 (Bank of England collection). Other works feature an elaborately embossed ginger jar which is also reminiscent of the work of Nelme, such as the example in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts dated 1693.

Silver was also used for the serving of wine, with elaborate cisterns, coolers and fountains. Roestraten's *Still Life with Silver Wine Decanter, Tulip, Yixing Teapot and Globe* has as its centrepiece an ornate silver wine



Pieter van Roestraten *Still Life with Silver Wine Decanter, Tulip, Yixing Teapot and Globe* c.1690  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

decanter (probably Dutch, c.1690), known as a pilgrim bottle. However, the use of silver decanters for the serving of wine had generally ceased by this period, being superseded by the newly-introduced lead glass decanters. With its former function redundant, the value of the silver decanter now lay in its decorative and aesthetic qualities.

**Tim Batchelor**



Simon Verelst *A vase of flowers* The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

## Flowers

In our modern age when florists stock flowers from all around the world, available out of season and for sale at accessible prices, it is difficult to imagine the sense of wealth, novelty and exoticism that still life flower paintings would have presented to the seventeenth-century viewer. Many of the everyday and familiar flowers that we take for granted were scarce, valuable and highly prized.

This is exemplified by the tulip, an exotic bulb originally from Turkey that was introduced to Europe from the mid-sixteenth century. In the early seventeenth century it became the most sought-after plant for the gardens of the wealthy Dutch, prompting 'tulip mania' with speculation and spiralling prices leading to a crash in 1637. Striped tulips were considered the finest specimens, with the 'Semper Augustus' variety (red and white striped) particularly coveted. A single bulb could sell for more than ten times the annual salary of a skilled craftsman. A similar craze for hyacinths, another exotic bulb originally from Turkey, occurred in the 1730s.

While the flowers would last perhaps a week at their best, flower paintings made it possible to capture their beauty for posterity, allowing the viewer to enjoy their flowers all year round. Artists would be judged by their skill at accurately portraying the flowers, but the arrangements they depict bring together varieties that would not be in bloom at the

same time – the painting giving the impression of true reality while at the same time representing a falsehood.

It is tempting to 'read' the paintings in terms of *vanitas*: the tulip referring to the greed and folly of tulip mania; flowers symbolising the transience of time, with the occasional pocket watch to add emphasis. But perhaps rather than signifying transience it is the ability of the painter to freeze time – the skill of the illusion – that is the main objective, tricking the viewer into believing they are seeing the real thing, rather like one of Collier's letter racks or Roestraten's 'portraits' of silver objects.

**Tim Batchelor**

# The Gamepiece

The gamepiece is an important sub-genre of still life painting, developing out of the kitchen scenes of the late sixteenth century in which dead game appeared among a range of other foodstuffs. It first flourished in the Low Countries through the work of artists such as Frans Snyders (1579–1657) who collaborated on numerous occasions with Rubens; later masters included Jan Weenix (1642–1719) and his cousin Melchior d'Hondecoeter (1636–1695).

In the Netherlands, as in Britain, the sport of hunting was, by law, the preserve of the wealthy ruling class. The rights of hunting are associated with the ownership of land: the animals that inhabit that land being the property of the landowner. Pictures of dead swans, ducks, deer and rabbits celebrate not only the fruits of the hunt and the lavish feast that would result, but also the wealth and property of the class who have ownership over this. As the genre developed into the later seventeenth century smaller, more focused, pictures were produced concentrating on a select group of birds and animals or a single specimen in detail. Other paintings include the equipment associated with hunting, such as netting to catch birds and game bags to collect the quarry.

Given the popularity of hunting in Britain, and indeed the number of gamepiece paintings cited in auction sales records, it is perhaps surprising that there were no gamepiece painters active in Britain

until the 1720s. Even William Ferguson, a painter of Scottish origin, lived and worked in the Netherlands despite records proving that his paintings were sold at auction in Edinburgh. Gamepiece paintings by other artists were also sold on a regular basis in London, suggesting that the cross-channel supply of still life paintings, including gamepieces, was sufficient to satisfy the British market.

**Tim Batchelor**



William Gow Ferguson *Still Life* 1684 Tate



## Tea

A familiar beverage closely associated with British national identity today, the drinking of tea first became fashionable in Britain during the late seventeenth century. This was largely due to trade with the Dutch, who had began importing tea regularly from the 1630s, but also to the influence of Catherine of Braganza, who became the English queen when she married Charles II in 1662. Tea had been a fashionable drink in Catherine's Portuguese homeland since the 1650s. Tradition has it that she continued the habit of taking this exotic new refreshment on her arrival in England, and aristocratic ladies then began to follow the new fashion set at court.

The English East India Company began to challenge Dutch interests in the tea trade, importing leaves on a commercial basis from their trading base in Canton (Guangzhou, China) from 1678. By 1690 tea was becoming increasingly available for sale through coffee houses, allowing wealthy women to purchase the leaves for use in the home. Originally prized for its medicinal properties, tea was now taken socially and known for its stimulating and invigorating effect. A whole new set of utensils and equipment was required for its production and consumption, from teacups, teapots and teaspoons to kettles and canisters. All of these objects, including the tea itself, were expensive and restricted to only the higher sections of society.

As the fashionable new beverage began to take hold, tea equipment

started to appear in paintings by Roestraten, who was then active in London. A regular element in his work is a red stoneware teapot, which can be found in different pictures in near identical form. This may be an original Chinese Yixing teapot which was being imported with tea and porcelain from the east, or possibly one of the many imitations being produced by European companies keen to benefit from this new demand, such as those by the Dutch potter Ary de Milde (active in Delft, 1670–1700).

### Tim Batchelor



Pieter van Roestraten *Still Life with Silver Wine Decanter, Tulip, Yixing Teapot and Globe* (detail) c.1690  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

## Lobsters

The image of a cooked lobster is a recurrent motif in still life paintings of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. These expensive crustaceans were often pictured alongside other luxury foodstuffs and paraphernalia associated with fine dining, in works known as *banketjes* or 'little banquet pieces'. This category of still life painting was exemplified by artists of the Dutch Golden Age such as Willem Kalf (1619–93) and Cornelis de Heem (1631–95), who routinely employed lobsters as emblems of wealth and opulence at a time when the Dutch global empire was at its zenith.

As a luxurious commodity enjoyed by affluent consumers, lobsters routinely featured in Dutch recipe books from the sixteenth century onwards, including *Eenen seer schoonen ende excellenten Cocboeck* ('An exquisite and excellent cookbook') by Karel Baten, published in Dordrecht in 1593. Thus, the image of a bright red lobster, freshly boiled and ready for consumption, became a key component in Dutch banquet scenes. The lobster was equally coveted as a meal in Britain: a pamphlet from 1644 lists a lobster among the foodstuffs on the table of Charles I. At this time England typically looked to France for influence in cuisine. *The French Cook* was published in London in 1653 as a translation of the original text by François Pierre de La Varenne (1615–78), chef to the marquis d'Uxelles, and featuring many lobster recipes including the first recorded 'bisque'. By the early



Charles Collins *Lobster on a Delft Dish* (detail) 1738 Tate

eighteenth-century dishes featuring lobsters were included in cookbooks such as *Royal cookery; or, the complete court-cook* (1710).

Charles Collins' depiction of a single lobster on a Delft dish, on the bare stone shelf of a larder, is strikingly simplified and very different from the lavish depiction of banquet tables by the earlier Dutch artists. Here, Collins is following the fashion set by gamepiece artists who presented smaller pictures of birds or animals set within in a similar architectural niche. As a British painter active in the 1730s Collins looked back to these two traditions of Dutch still life painting and conflated elements of both to create a startlingly new composition.

### Peter Moore



Parry Walton *Still Life* before 1686 The Trustees of Dulwich Picture Gallery, London

## Further Reading

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F. Lewis, *Simon Pietersz Verelst, 'The God of Flowers', 1644–1721*, Leigh-on-Sea 1979

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S.H. Pavière, *Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer, 1634–1699*, Leigh-on-Sea 1966

D. Pring, *The Negotiation of Meaning in the Musical Vanitas and Still-Life Painting of Edwaert Collier (c. 1640 – c. 1709)*, Vienna 2012

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S. A. Sullivan, *The Dutch Gamepiece*, Woodbridge 1984

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P. Taylor, *Dutch Flower Painting, 1600–1720*, London and New Haven 1995

P. Taylor, *Dutch Flower Painting, 1600–1750*, exhibition catalogue, Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1996

D. Wahrman, *Mr. Collier's Letter Racks: A Tale of Art and Illusion at the Threshold of the Modern Information Age*, New York 2012

A. van der Willigen and F.G. Meijer, *A Dictionary of Dutch and Flemish Painters Working in Oils 1525–1725*, Leiden 2003

## List of exhibited works

Edward Collier (c.1642–1708)  
*Still Life with a Volume of Wither's 'Emblemes'* 1696  
 Oil on canvas 838 x 1079 mm  
 Tate. Purchased 1949  
 N05916

Edward Collier (c.1642–1708)  
*Still Life* 1699  
 Oil on canvas 762 x 635 mm  
 Tate. Purchased 1948  
 N05856

Edward Collier (c.1642–1708)  
*A Trompe l'Oeil of Newspapers, Letters and Writing Implements on a Wooden Board* c.1699  
 Oil on canvas 588 x 462 mm  
 Tate. Purchased 1984  
 T03853

Edward Collier (c.1642–1708)  
*Trompe l'Oeil with Writing Materials* c.1702  
 Oil on canvas 515 x 637 mm  
 Victoria and Albert Museum, London  
 P.23-1951

Edward Collier (c.1642–1708)  
*An Allegory of Wealth and Temporal Power: a vanitas still life of court jewels in a casket, a globe, sword, and a miniature of Charles I, all resting on a cloth covered table* 1705  
 Oil on canvas 975 x 1250 mm  
 Private collection

Charles Collins (c.1680–1744)  
*Lobster on a Delft Dish* 1738  
 Oil on canvas 705 x 910 mm  
 Tate. Purchased 1981  
 T03301

William Gow Ferguson (c.1633-1695)  
*Still Life* 1684  
 Oil on canvas 654 x 540 mm  
 Tate. Purchased 1955  
 T00061

Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer (1636–1699)  
*Still life of mixed flowers in a vase on a ledge*  
 Oil on canvas 1075 x 850 mm  
 The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge  
 PD.120–1992

Pieter van Roestraten (1630–1700)  
*Porringer, German Cup and Oysters* c.1680  
 Oil on canvas 768 x 639 mm  
 Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Bequeathed by Lionel A. Crichton, 1939  
 P.3–1939

Pieter van Roestraten (1630–1700)  
*Still Life with Silver Wine Decanter, Tulip, Yixing Teapot and Globe* c.1690  
 Oil on canvas 762 x 635 mm  
 Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Bequeathed by Lionel A. Crichton, 1939  
 P.5-1939

Simon Verelst (1644–c.1710/17)  
*Vase of flowers*  
 Oil on canvas 1066 x 888 mm  
 The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge  
 PD.48-1966

Simon Verelst (1644-c.1710/17)  
*A vase of flowers*  
 Oil on canvas 845 x 706 mm  
 The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge  
 PD.93–1973

Parry Walton (c.1665–1702)  
*Still Life* before 1686  
 Oil on canvas 639 x 552 mm  
 The Trustees of Dulwich Picture Gallery, London  
 DPG 429

Thomas Warrender (fl.1673–1713)  
*Still Life* 1708  
 Oil on canvas 591 x 743 mm  
 Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh  
 Purchased 1980  
 NG 2404

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## Court, Country, City: British Art, 1660-1735

*Dead Standing Things* is the second of two displays at Tate Britain organised as part of 'Court, Country, City: British Art, 1660-1735', a major research project run by the University of York and Tate Britain, and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

More information and details about the project can be found at [www.york.ac.uk/history-of-art/court-country-city](http://www.york.ac.uk/history-of-art/court-country-city)



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### **The art world in Britain 1660 to 1735**

*The art world in Britain 1660 to 1735* publishes primary sources and research tools for the study of the arts in Britain between the restoration of Charles II and the opening of Hogarth's St Martin's Lane Academy. Launched in October 2011, this long-term project will create a large body of transcribed sources that will underpin secondary databases, to include a biographical dictionary, a topographical index, a calendar of art sales and a database of transactions.

[artworld.york.ac.uk](http://artworld.york.ac.uk)

A longer version of 'From *dead-standing-things* to *still life*' by Caroline Good and a short essay by Peter Moore on still life and British graphic art can be found on the *Dead Standing Things* display micro-site hosted by the University of York at [www.york.ac.uk/history-of-art/court-country-city](http://www.york.ac.uk/history-of-art/court-country-city)

Further information about the individual works in the Tate collection featured in this booklet can be found via the Tate website at: [www.tate.org.uk/art](http://www.tate.org.uk/art)





Simon Verelst *A vase of flowers* (detail)  
The Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum,  
Cambridge

A familiar genre today, still life painting became established in Britain in the late seventeenth century. Writing in the 1650s, the author William Sanderson referred to such paintings as 'dead-standing-things', the term 'still life' (from the Dutch 'stilleven') only appearing in the following decades. Characterised as the detailed depiction of inanimate objects, the genre had been established in the Netherlands early in the seventeenth century and its introduction in Britain was through the work and influence of Dutch incomer artists.

This booklet, published to accompany a display at Tate Britain, draws attention to this little-known area of British art history, highlighting the work of the artists who introduced the genre to Britain and giving a sense of the context in which they were operating.



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