

AN INVESTIGATIVE STUDY OF PAINTINGS  
CONTAINING TRANSPARENT GLASSWARE

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION

Transparent glassware has been depicted, from a historical point of view, as both functional and decorative by painters throughout the centuries. An attempt is made by the writer to describe the phenomenon of the appearance of transparent glassware in paintings from antiquity to the present time.

Some questions pondered in the study are as follows:

1. Who are the artists?
2. Did each artist have a style or technique peculiar to him alone?
3. What importance, if any, can be attributed to the depiction of transparent glassware within the paintings?
4. Is there any apparent symbolism connected to the glassware?

#### Statement of the Problem

In this study the researcher identified and analyzed paintings which depict transparent glassware, and executed a series of paintings with transparent

glassware as the principal subject matter or as incidental subject matter.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine those paintings which depict transparent glassware and execute a series of paintings with transparent glassware as the principal subject matter or as incidental subject matter.

### Justification for the Study

There was a lack of definitive existent material on the rendition of transparent glassware within paintings. There was a need for the study in order to determine the styles, methods and techniques used in selected paintings which depict transparent glassware. There was also a need for documenting material which may be helpful to students of painting who would like to achieve the illusion of transparent glassware within their paintings.

The writer found that although artists have included transparent glassware in their paintings since the days of Pompeii, there has been little written on the subject.

Since glass has the unique characteristic of being simultaneously transparent and reflective, there are many possibilities for painting various visual planes.

The challenge was to determine by research how artists of the past, as well as contemporary painters, handled the problem, and to execute a series of paintings in which transparent glassware is the principal subject matter or is incidental subject matter.

#### Delimitations

The researcher limited the study to the following areas.

1. The study included a brief history of still life painting.

2. The study limited the investigation to those paintings which included transparent glassware.

3. The study limited the investigation of paintings to the following time periods or schools of painting.

- A. Roman
- B. Italian
- C. Spanish
- D. French
- E. Dutch
- F. American

4. The researcher determined the styles used by the various painters and made a comparative analysis of the paintings.

5. The study included:

- A. A review of related literature
- B. Photographs of selected paintings
- C. A comparative analysis of the paintings
- D. Vocabulary list
- E. Reference list

6. The researcher executed a series of paintings depicting transparent glassware.

Definitions of Terms

Color: The surface quality of a form or surface derived from sunlight. An object that is yellow has absorbed all the hues of the spectrum except yellow, which it reflects. In painting, color is also used to mean "paint" - dry pigments mixed with liquids which bond and/or extend the pigment. (Painting: Ideas, Materials, Processes, p. 135)

Glass: An amorphous inorganic, usually transparent or translucent substance consisting of a mixture of silicates or sometimes borates or phosphates formed by fusion of silica or of oxides of boron or phosphorus with a flux and a stabilizer into a mass that cools to a rigid condition without crystalization. (Webster's New Collegiate

Dictionary, p. 484)

Glassware: Articles made of glass. (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 484)

Ground: The support or surface on which the painting is executed. Examples: canvas, paper, hardboard, Ground is also used in referring to the coating that is applied to a panel or canvas prior to painting. (Painting: Ideas, Materials, Processes, p. 137)

Illusionism: The use of artistic techniques to create the illusion of reality, especially in a work of art. (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 566)

Still Life: A picture consisting predominately of inanimate objects. (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 1134)

Style: A manner of expression characteristic of an individual, period, school, or nation. (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 1148)

Transparent: Having the property of transmitting light without appreciable scattering so that the bodies lying beyond are entirely visible. (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 1233)

## CHAPTER II.

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A number of publications and books were examined as background for this study. These are listed in the Reference List at the end of this study and are briefly described below. Some are historical, while others deal with techniques, styles and methods. In some manner, all of them contributed to the study, although few addressed the problem of how to handle the actual rendering of paintings containing transparent glassware.

Wolfgang Born's book, Still Life Painting in America, focuses on early artists in the United States. The text was written from a historical point of view and did not mention glassware, style or techniques, although many excellent examples of paintings containing glassware appeared in the section on plates. There are 134 reproductions, all of which are black and white.

Max J. Friedlander's Landscape, Portrait, Still Life is a well-written book containing 41 illustrations. It discusses the evolution of the still life painting, although not as thoroughly as some others in this study.

One source which was relied upon for considerable information in the chapter dealing with the history of

still life is Charles Sterling's book, Still Life Painting from Antiquity to the Present Time, published in 1959.

His book is very thorough and continues from one century to the next, showing an overlapping of ideas from one artist to another.

Paul Zucker's book, Styles in Painting, A Comparative Study, includes comments on several paintings which are a part of this investigative study. The Pompeian mural, "Peaches and Glass Jar," Caravaggio's still life, and Pieter Claesz's "Breakfast Table" are all included. There is an interesting section on still life in general.

Books which were examined concerning the history of glassware are 5000 Years of Glass, by Frances Rogers and Alice Beard, published in 1937; Glass, by George Savage, published in 1965; and Glass and Glassware, also by George Savage, published in 1973. Found in all three books was the story by Pliny. He told of Phoenician merchants, encamped on a seashore, who lit a fire underneath a cooking pot supported on lumps of natron (soda), and later found the sand fused into glass. Savage believes this story was fiction and states that although the first surviving records of glass come from Mesopotamia, archeological studies show that vitreous glazes had been used in Egypt for covering stone beads before 3000 B.C.

Herculaneum, Italy's Buried Treasure was written by Joseph Jay Deiss. It is an interesting book of historical value. Illustrations in the book show glassware typical of Herculaneum and Pompeii. Bowls and vases were frequently made of crystal, sometimes clear and sometimes colored. Deiss states that the jars were in commercial use, for jams, marinated vegetables, etc. and that thousands have been found.

Michael Grant is the author of a small book, Pompeii and Herculaneum, published by Newsweek in 1979. It contains a color reproduction of the wall fresco, "Peaches and a Glass Jar". Most of the information on Pompeii and Herculaneum is essentially the same in several sources.

Gilbert Picard's book, Roman Painting, offers some background on wall paintings discovered at the excavation sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum. It is felt that many of the Roman paintings are copies of irretrievably lost paintings of classical Greece.

A History of Greek Art, by Martin Robertson, contains black and white reproductions of two wall paintings from Pompeii. Both contain transparent glassware, and both are hanging in the Naples Museum.



Theodore H. Feder's Great Treasures of Pompeii and Herculaneum, published in 1978, contains a color reproduction of "Still Life with Bowl of Fruit" from the House of Julia Felix in Pompeii. A detailed description of the painting is also included.

Julius S. Held and Donald Posner's art history book entitled, 17th and 18th Century Art, includes most of the artists in this study, although not in depth. It strictly deals with art history and does not go into the specifics of procedural techniques. Some important facts were found in this book which added to this investigative study.

H. W. Janson's History of Art, published in 1970, is very similar to the one written by Held and Posner. Several concise but important bits of information were taken from this source.

One important source was Waldemar Januszczak's Techniques of the World's Great Painters, published in 1980. Januszczak explains the painting techniques of both Velazquez and Caravaggio. The color reproductions in the book are also repeated in detail. He also discusses their palettes and grounds.

Among the several books on Valazquez is one by Jose Lopez-Rey simply entitled, Velazquez. Some information

is gleaned from this book regarding the painting, "The Waterseller of Seville" but no special explanation on technique.

The most useful parts of Jose Gudiol's book, Velazquez are the reproductions. Most of the text material on Velazquez is chosen from other sources.

The Corning New York Museum of Glass published a concise book entitled, Glass Vessels in Dutch Painting of the 17th Century, along with an exhibition which was shown from August 15 to October 1, 1952. The information in this book is extremely helpful in identifying the major artists of the 17th century who excelled in the depiction of transparent glassware in their paintings. Also, great detail is given to the description and use of individual pieces of glassware. The Director of the Corning Museum of Glass is Thomas S. Buechner.

Dutch still lifes are the subject of Madlyn Millner Kahr's book, Dutch Painting in the Seventeenth Century, published in 1978. Excellent reproductions are also a part of this book. Notes on Pieter Claesz and Willem Claesz Heda come from Kahr's book.

A worthwhile commentary on Rembrandt's self-portrait with Saskia appears in Bob Haak's book, Rembrandt, His Life, Work and Times. His interpretation of "Rembrandt

and Saskia" has a deeper meaning than some earlier critics. This is more fully explained in the section on Rembrandt.

A Treasury of Impressionism by Nathaniel Harris is a book that dwells more on the personal lives of the artists than it does on their work. However, it has many full-page, beautiful color reproductions. Some information on Manet is taken from this source.

Two other books from which some information concerning Manet is gleaned are Great Masters of French Impressionism by J. Carter Brown and Diane Kelder, and Manet, by George Mauner. Mauner's book is a study of Manet's themes and philosophy.

Some notes on Chardin are taken from the book, entitled, Masterpieces of Painting in the Metropolitan Museum, by Edith A. Standen and Thomas M. Folds. It is a catalog of paintings with descriptions and some background information on each painting.

Among the books examined is Rudy deReyna's Magic Realist Oil Painting. Sharp focus realism is a painting technique that produces an accurate and lifelike image through the detailed rendering of a subject. His book begins with an explanation of all the materials and equipment needed. He discusses the technical and creative possibilities of brushes, colors, tools, and painting

surfaces. Twelve preliminary exercises are outlined in basic oil painting techniques.

Twenty step-by-step demonstrations are given on how to paint a wide assortment of subjects with different variations of his realist technique. De Reyna's subject matter includes still lifes with transparent glassware. Each demonstration is begun with a preliminary sketch. Next he shows how to transfer the sketch to the painting surface and finally, he develops the painting's composition, color, and shapes. The illustrations covering the demonstrations are all in color. The book is clear and easy to understand. It is very helpful as a reference for the series of paintings executed by the writer as a part of this study.

The Oil Painting Book, by Wendon Blake, published in 1979, is another instructional book on techniques of painting. Although the book is basic in the step-by-step demonstrations, it is not as valuable as the one by Rudy deReyna.

In Bernard Dunstan's book, Learning to Paint, published in 1978, there is a chapter entitled "Planes and Changes of Planes". He explains that a curved plane can be considered as composed of a succession of small, flat planes, just as a curved line can be considered as constructed from straight lines. This information can be

helpful when trying to accurately render the many faceted areas of a transparent glass. This book stresses the importance of being observant. It is divided into three main parts: observation of nature, color, and the structure of a picture. The book contains black and white illustrations and a few in color.

A handy reference book on how to render specific paintings is The Second Painter's Problem Book, by Joseph Dawley published in 1978. For example, demonstrations on how to paint a crystal bowl with flowers, a glass of water with ice, and condensation droplets on glass are all included with step-by-step explanations. This book was referred to for information needed to execute the series of paintings executed by the author of this study.

Although Max Doerner's book, The Materials of the Artist, has been a reliable source of information since its publication in 1934, it does not deal specifically with the treatment of transparent glassware within paintings. Techniques of certain old masters are discussed thoroughly, but not the ones in this study.

Similar to Max Doerner's book is Sir Charles Lock Eastlake's Methods and Materials of Painting of the Great Schools and Masters which was originally published in 1869. This book is examined mostly for general information, but

there are two sections of particular interest: chiaroscuro preparations (as might be related to Rembrandt's style) and transparent painting, (although not necessarily related to glassware).

Painting for Pleasure is a book written by John FitzMaurice Mills and published in 1977. Mills is a painter, picture restorer, broadcaster and author, with many years of experience in the arts. In this book he describes the different materials and equipment necessary for working in various media. Techniques for each medium are explained in considerable detail. This book was beneficial as a reference source for the series of paintings executed by the writer in connection with this study.

Olle Nordmark, a native of Sweden, is the author of Complete Course in Oil Painting. He received his art training in Sweden and in other parts of Europe. In his book all aspects of oil painting are covered in detail with complete technical information.

The book, Perception and Pictorial Representation, is a collection of writings by various authors published in 1979. The book was edited by Calvin F. Nodine and Dennis F. Fisher with a forward by Rudolf Arnheim. Thought-provoking ideas are offered in this book which merit considerable study. The section which is applicable to this paper

discusses pictorial representation of subjective contours which, in this instance, would be contours of transparent glassware. It is maintained that subjective contours are "visible and visibly unreal," as in optical illusions, at one and the same time (just as a picture allows one to see depth and flatness at the same time).

Colin Naylor and Genesis P-Orridge's Contemporary Artists, published in 1977, is a large reference book containing a collection of information on contemporary artists. In this book are found the artist's birthdate, address, educational background, art dealer, individual shows, group shows, collections, publications, and a short review of the artist's work. Material on Janet Fish and Richard Estes was located in this book.

Richard Estes: The Urban Landscape is a very informative and entertaining book which was prepared from an interview with Richard Estes in 1978. The authors and interviewers are John Canaday and John Arthur. Included are many excellent photographs of Estes's paintings as well as candid pictures of the artist at work in his studio. Since Estes is a contemporary painter, very little has been written about him, and this book is the most complete source found.

Contemporary writer and critic, Linda Chase, has articles which appear in art publications regularly. In the November-December 1972 issue of Art in America she contributed an article entitled, "The Photo Realists: 12 Interviews". Her interview with Richard Estes is both enlightening and interesting.

Another article written by Linda Chase entitled "The Connotation of Denotation," was published in Arts Magazine in February 1974. Richard Estes was also included in this issue.

Current periodicals proved to be a good source of information on contemporary artists. Ellen Lubell, writer and art critic, is a regular contributor to Arts Magazine. Her article in the May 1979 issue describes several of Janet Fish's colorful paintings. She discusses her compositions and her continuing collection of miscellaneous glassware.

In the December 1977 issue of Arts Magazine, an article appeared which is of interest. "The Veristic Eye: Some Contemporary American Affinities with Luis Melendez, Spanish Painter of Still-Life Phenomenology," by Eleanor Tufts has much to say about Janet Fish in comparison with Melendez. Also, Jed Perl's article, "The Life of the Object: Still Life Painting Today,"



in the same issue, comments on certain aspects of contemporary still-life painting.

Another article featuring Janet Fish was "Through a Glass Brightly," by Bill L. Shirey which appeared in the February 1974 issue of Arts Magazine. Her painting of five fruit jars is also shown.

Cindy Nemser is a writer-critic who contributes regularly to Arts Magazine. In May 1972 her article, "The Close up Vision--Representational Art - Part II," was published, which included Janet Fish.

Linda Nochlin describes Janet Fish as a pictorial phenomenologist in her article, "Some Women Realists: Part I," which was featured in the February 1974 issue of Arts Magazine.

The October 1982 issue of American Artist features a well-written article entitled "Janet Fish: Perceptual Realist" by Jane Cottingham. Three full-page color reproductions are included within the article along with five small black and white prints and, as an extra bonus, a detail of one of her paintings enhances the cover of the magazine.

### CHAPTER III.

#### HISTORICAL REVIEW OF STILL LIFE PAINTING

To discover the beginning of transparent glassware in paintings, one would necessarily look to the beginning of still life painting. Although there is some controversy as to the actual beginning of independent still life painting, some authorities maintain that it originated in Italy and was directly connected with the revival of the ideas of antiquity. Charles Sterling states in his book, Still Life Painting From Antiquity to the Present Time, that the Greeks may have been the first people to paint pictures which can properly be described as still lifes, and that "not a single still life has come down to us from this remote period." (Sterling, 1959, p. 9)

Our only notion of this art derives from descriptions of it left by ancient writers and from later works brought to light in excavations. Paintings and mosaics have survived at Pompeii, Herculaneum. . . . They date from the first century B.C. to the fourth century A.D., and in some of them archeologists have good grounds for discerning direct reflections and more or less faithful reminiscences of lost prototypes of the great period shrouded in the silence of the ages. (Sterling, 1959, p. 9)

Pliny the Elder, who perished in the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 A.D. tells in his writings that the most famous Greek painter of still lifes was Piraikos.

Sterling explains the character of the first still lifes:

When the still life picture made its appearance, it assumed at once a highly distinctive character. Its stock theme was food, and it was designated by the name xenion (i.e. the present made to a guest) . . . . Favorite subjects were loaves of bread, fresh fruit and vegetables, eggs and dairy products, seafood, choice meats such as game and fowl, jugs and vases containing water, oil and wine, together with terracotta ware, fine glassware, metal bowls and goblets, and table napkins. (Sterling, 1959, p. 12)

The painting of xenia continued in Roman times, and in the excavated houses of Herculaneum and Pompeii we find many examples of them. In all probability, as has been pointed out, the choice of foodstuffs painted at Pompeii was dictated by the economic standing of those who commissioned the paintings; and, at Pompeii, they were either well-to-do owners of vineyards and orchards or prosperous merchants dealing in wine and agricultural produce. In larger cities like Naples and Rome, still life paintings tended to include other objects, notably a greater profusion of vases and silverware. (Sterling, 1959, p. 12)

Examples of transparent glassware depicted in wall paintings of Pompeii and Herculaneum are shown in Figures 1 and 2. Both of these will be discussed later in this paper.

In describing the style of ancient still life paintings, Sterling notices an impressionism comparable to that of the 19th century in some of the paintings.

Whether a Hellenistic work or a faithful Roman copy of one, it is virtually a painting executed in cubes of color, of the most amazing delicacy, which play the part of tiny brushstrokes. The supple relief of petals, the light of day, the transparent shadows saturated with moist air, are all rendered with touches of color whose diversity, when seen from a distance, merges into exactly the right tones. Here we are entitled to speak of an impressionism comparable to that of the 19th century. (Sterling, 1959, p. 13)

In contrast, Sterling also describes the style of other ancient still life paintings as similar to those artists who emphasized tonal values.

But as far as the most advanced and the best preserved still lifes in fresco are concerned, it must be admitted that the term Impressionism is misleading. The vibrant surface life of objects and the sharply accentuated volumes derive from an illusionism of light, not of color. They are obtained by accurate contrasts of tones of shadow and tones of light. It is a painting in which values are handled with great sensitivity, and analogies to it must be looked for in the art of the precursors of Impressionism, such as Velazquez, Goya, Manet, each a master of values; . . . (Sterling, 1959, pp. 14-15)

Two invariable characteristics are observable in the still life finds at Herculaneum and Pompeii: still life was realistic, and it served as a decorative purpose.

Interest in still life painting gradually spread to other countries. The influence of antiquity increased as motifs were borrowed from the ancients and inspiration

was taken from their writings. Sterling says that chronologically speaking, no particular country can be said to have priority over the others in the progression of the history of still life.

The first easel pictures representing still lifes appeared simultaneously on both sides of the Alps about the year 1600 . . . . Italy, . . . thanks to Caravaggio, inaugurated the modern still life: seen no longer from above, but in profile so to speak, level with the eye; monumental because grouped according to the rhythmic patterns of large-scale painting; striking in its effect because modeled in sharply focused light. (Sterling, 1959, p. 45)

## CHAPTER IV.

### ROMAN PERIOD

It is generally felt by art historians that the Romans copied their art work from the Greeks. Gilbert Picard states in his book, Roman Painting, that the Romans borrowed their ideas from the enormous treasury of Greek paintings, which have long since been lost. (Picard, Introduction, 1968) He notes that the still lifes of the Roman Era depicted mainly foodstuffs, and feels that they lack originality.

The still lifes, which have recently been studied by J. M. Croisille, mainly depict eatables, recalling either feasts which the owner of the house prepared for his friends or offerings which he vowed to domestic divinities. . . . From what we have seen of it so far, the Pompeian house is little more than a sort of museum, where the master of the house has assembled some indications of his literary and artistic interests, of his inclinations toward the exotic or the rustic, and even of his more sensual pleasures (to the greediness suggested by some of the still lifes must be added the eroticism of a few paintings). All that is missing is life and originality. (Picard, Introduction, 1968)

Picard gives the reason for the reproduction of Greek paintings by the Romans.

The Romans let themselves be persuaded by the Greeks that perfection had been attained in easel painting by the great masters of the fourth century; in the absence of equal skill, there was nothing to do but recopy

their works, which were given a quasi-religious veneration. (Picard, Introd. 1968)

The writer was able to locate two reproductions of wall paintings depicting transparent glassware during the Roman Era. (Figures 1 and 2) Both of these frescoes are from the first century A.D. and were discovered during the excavation of Pompeii and Herculaneum hundreds of years after those two Italian cities were destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

Fresco is a technique of wall painting known in classical antiquity. Waldemar Januszczak explains the technique in his book, Techniques of the World's Great Painters.

Fresco is brush painting on freshly applied, wet lime plaster, using water as the vehicle so that the substance of the paint penetrates the plaster, and, as the plaster dries, the pigment is bound into the crystalline structure. Paint is laid on the plaster while it is still wet. This meant that only that area of plaster which could be painted over in one day was laid down. (Januszczak, 1980, p. 10)

"Peaches and a Glass Jar" is a mural painting from a house in Pompeii (Figure 1) and now hangs in a Naples Museum. Some authorities feel that this fresco is from nearby Herculaneum.

Paul Zucker refers to this painting as "Peaches with Water Jar" in his book, Styles in Painting, a Comparative Study, and attributes it to a Pompeian artist

between 63-79 A.D. He says that Roman still lifes generally appeared in murals or mosaics, and only rarely as independent paintings and that they aimed at realism:

Decorative or naturalistic according to the trend of the time, the Roman still life aimed at realistic illusion through the use of line and color, means identical with those of post-Renaissance painting. The rendering of the glass jar in this still life, for example, is not excelled in creation of pure illusion by anything in later oil painting. The handling of perspective and of light and shade was certainly as competent in later Hellenist as in seventeenth-century still life. The difference lies in the visual intention, for Roman still life remained content to use the achievements of illusion for pure decoration. (Zucker, 1950, p. 262)

A second wall-painting from the Roman era which was also discovered at Pompeii is shown in Martin Robertson's book, A History of Greek Art. Untitled, this painting is very similar in composition to "Peaches with Water Jar." The objects in both paintings are arranged on two shelves. While one has peaches on a limb which drapes from the top to the lower shelf, the second painting has a flat round pan of vegetables on the top shelf and three vegetables on the lower shelf. Each has a transparent glass container situated on the right corner of the lower shelf, and both glass jars appear to contain water. (A color reproduction of the one depicting vegetables was not available.) In both instances, the artist has made a linear definition



of the transparent glassware by using white pigment. Highlights have been added appropriately. Although the artist is not known, both paintings could easily have been done by the same person. They were almost identical.

In History of Art, H. W. Janson is less than complimentary to the unknown artist who rendered "Peaches and Glass Jar."

Our example is particularly noteworthy for the rendering of the translucent glass jar half-filled with water. The reflections are so acutely observed that we feel the painter must have copied them from an actual jar illuminated in just this way. But if we try to determine the source and direction of the light in the picture, we find that this cannot be done, because the shadows cast by the various objects are not consistent with each other. Nor do we have the impression that the jar stands in a stream of light; instead, the light seems to be imprisoned within the jar. Clearly, the Roman artist, despite his striving for illusionistic effects, is no more systematic in his approach to the behavior of light than in his handling of perspective. (Janson, 1970, p. 153)

Theodore H. Feder in his book, Great Treasures of Pompeii and Herculaneum, shows his readers a still life with a large transparent crystal fruit bowl from the House of Julia Felix in Pompeii. See Figure 2.

In this still life a delightful crystal bowl overflows the Campanian fruit. We recognize the large bunch of grapes, a staple of Pompeii's economy, and some apples,

figs, and pomegranates. One ripe pomegranate has fallen from the bowl and split open, spilling some of its seeds onto the shelf.

At the right, an earthenware jug is piled high with what may be figs, and in the back an amphora leans against the wall, its lid sealed tightly with chords fastened to the handles.

The artist playfully reveals the contents of one container, wholly conceals the contents of another, and gives us a glimpse of the probable contents of the third, thereby seeming to satisfy and to tempt us at the same time. Compositionally, each container is echoed by a smaller shape at its side; with the ample bowl, it is the overripe pomegranate, with the closed amphora, an apple, and finally in the case of the earthenware jug, its own lid, which cannot fit over the bulging contents. The painting is organized on two tiers, with pride of place going to the raised glass bowl, which receives most of the light. (Feder, 1978, p. 150)

The focal point of this painting is obviously the large crystal bowl overflowing with fruit. Through the crystal bowl one can see the apples and pomegranates and marvel at the skill of the artist 2,000 years ago who was able to achieve this effect of transparency.



Figure 1. ROMAN  
"PEACHES AND GLASS JAR"



Figure 2. ROMAN  
"DETAIL OF STILL LIFE WITH FRUIT"

## CHAPTER V.

### ITALIAN --- CARAVAGGIO

Michelangelo Merisi, called Caravaggio after his birthplace near Milan, was born in 1573. He spent most of his life in Rome where he did many of his paintings; however, the last four years of his life were spent in Naples where he died in 1603.

Waldemar Januszczak describes Caravaggio's style as "vividly realistic" and notes that some critics bitterly attacked his paintings for their total rejection of idealization, which had been the chief aim of Renaissance art, and for their dramatic use of light and shadow. Nevertheless, he had a profound influence on many artists who followed his style. (Januszczak, 1980, p. 40)

Caravaggio's "The Supper at Emmaus" (Figure 3) is thought to have been painted between 1596 and 1603. It measures 55 x 77½ inches and was painted on smooth finely-woven canvas, which Januszczak speculates was made from flax. Caravaggio was known to have used canvas made from flax for many of his pictures. The ground is a dark deep brown.

Studying "The Supper at Emmaus," Januszczak notes:

1. Having sketched in the outlines of the composition, Caravaggio would have blocked

in the main areas of color with a large bristle brush.

2. Subsequent layers of paint would have been applied with softer brushes. The contrasts of light and shadow would have been blended with a soft, broad brush.

3. Detailed work would have been added last using fine, soft brushes with a delicate point.

4. Oil glazes would have been used to modify the colors of the drapery. Christ's robe would have been covered with a red lake oil glaze. (Januszczak, 1980, p. 40)

Concerning the light source for the painting of

"The Supper at Emmaus," the author observes:

Light falls on the figures from a steep angle. The source of light in the studio might have been an oil lamp or a small high north-facing window. The window would have been fitted not with glass but with a sheet of paper, made transparent by soaking it either in oil or animal fat. This would provide a warm, constant light ideal for artist's studios. (Januszczak, 1980, p. 40)

Januszczak believes "The Supper at Emmaus" to be one of the artist's most important paintings as he comments in his book:

This is one of Caravaggio's most important works and shows his complete mastery and use of extreme light and shadow, arrangement of figures, and dramatic gestures to focus attention on the figure of Christ. The rich, glowing tones, which indicate a preference for warm ochres, vermilion and lead tin yellow, are characteristic of Caravaggio's color scheme. (Januszczak, 1980, p. 41)

The traditional medium of linseed oil was thought to have been used by Caravaggio, according to Januszczak.

The smooth unbroken paint surface of the picture suggests Caravaggio used soft hair brushes and a fluid oil medium -- probably linseed oil. Linseed tends to yellow, but this would not have adversely affected the warm earth colors of Caravaggio's works. (Januszczak, 1980, p. 40)

The scene in "The Supper at Emmaus" depicts Christ with two of his friends seated for a simple meal consisting of poultry, fruit and bread. The white tablecloth contrasts with the darkness of the room and causes the viewer's attention to focus on the food items. The light is from some unknown source on the left, according to the placement of the shadows on the table and on the wall. The transparent glass beverage container appears to hold water.

It is interesting to note that the transparent glass container in this painting is identical to the one in Caravaggio's painting entitled, "Still Life," (Figure 4) which measures 19 7/8 x 28 1/4 inches and hangs in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Both appear to hold water and both are located on the left side of the table.

The same spherical transparent jar is seen in a third painting by Caravaggio entitled, "Boy Bitten by a

Lizard." See Figure 5 for a detailed view of this painting.

Another painting by Caravaggio, entitled "Bacchus," shown in Figure 6, depicts a similar round transparent beverage container. It also is located on the left side of the table, but is different from the other paintings in that the pouring spout is fluted and it obviously is filled with wine instead of water. In all these instances, the backgrounds are dark and the accent highlights of white paint on the glassware are placed in the same or nearly the same locations. The work entitled, "Still Life," shows some reflection in the transparent glassware of the fruit located next to it.

Some writers, including Sterling, consider Caravaggio one of the most independent, most revolutionary masters of European painting in the late 16th and early 17th century. His painting assumed a "modern" form as compared to earlier artists. The manner in which Caravaggio handled the painting of fruit and flowers is diametrically opposed to that of decoration.

He aimed at rendering cose naturali really natural, with all their succulent life. . . . Caravaggio recorded the details most apt to horrify the academic idealism then developing under the auspices of the Counter-Reformation: transparent drops of water, worm-eaten

leaves, with shriveled or wilted edges, just as they look after serving as a model for several days in a painter's studio. . . . And his worm holes have by no means the same spiritual and plastic significance as those of the Netherlanders. . . . For Caravaggio, these were expressive tokens of the natural decay of life; he used such details more sparingly than the Flemings, but he laid more stress on them. (Sterling, 1959, p. 59)

In most of his paintings, Caravaggio grouped his figures against a plain, dark background and spotlighted them with an intense revealing light. This skillful manipulation of light and shadow within a painting is called "chiaroscuro," which, in its literal translation means, "light-dark." Caravaggio and Rembrandt are the artists particularly associated with "chiaroscuro." (Januszczak, 1980, p. 186)





Figure 3. CARAVAGGIO  
"THE SUPPER AT EMMAUS"



Figure 4. CARAVAGGIO  
"STILL LIFE"



Figure 6. CARAVAGGIO  
"BACCHUS"

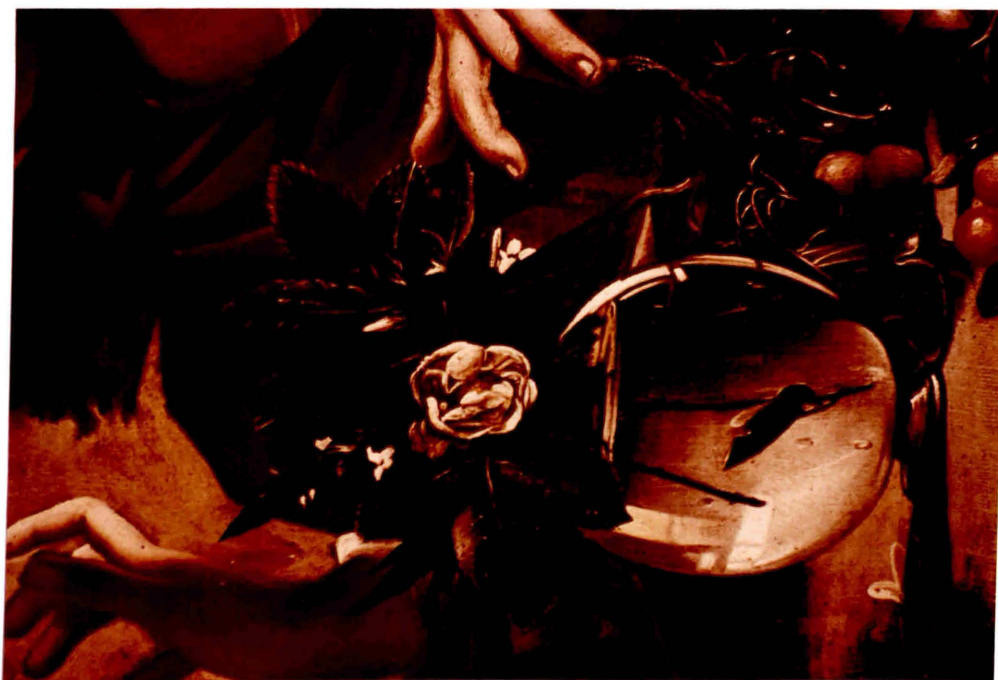


Figure 5. CARAVAGGIO  
DETAIL OF "BOY BITTEN BY A LIZARD"

## CHAPTER VI.

### SPANISH -- VELAZQUEZ

Diego Rodriquez de Silva Velazquez was an artist of the Spanish School. He lived between the years 1599 and 1660 and was a master of realism, according to Xavier de Salas in his book, Velazquez.

A master of light and chiaroscuro and of the values of color, Velazquez possessed a style of extraordinary freedom, which gradually became bolder, broader and more flowing. In his particular technique he stands without a peer. (de Salas, 1962, Introduction)

Velazquez started painting in brown and greenish dark tones, illuminating and shading the objects in such a way that they stand out strongly from the dark background. This idiom coincided with Caravaggio, some of whose works he must have seen. (de Salas, 1962, p. 4)

Another new element can be observed in Velazquez's paintings of the late twenties: the general tone is no longer brown; Velazquez is now painting in blacks and greys. Velazquez was among the many Italian and non-Italian artists then seeking a new oath after their Caravaggiesque periods; he the greatest of them all and in his work the change of style is most apparent. (de Salas, 1962, p. 6)

Sterling studies Velazquez's style and relates it to that of Caravaggio.

It was about 1617, at the age of eighteen, that Velazquez began painting his genre scenes in which still life assumes a certain importance. . . . Velazquez approached nature with a more sensual vision and a freer brush than Caravaggio did. There was no concern

for linear precision in his manner; no sustained or controlled stylization; but a style which seems to be an innate order of nature, a firm cadence of patches of shade and patches of light. He loses sight of neither reflections nor flickerings of light. But more laconic than Caravaggio, he gives an image of form that is more compact, more summarily divided between light and shade. His was a spontaneity of vision hitherto unknown. It suggests an immediate, almost brutal communion between bodies and atmosphere, and gives rise to a relationship of pictorial elements which is as different from Caravaggio as it is from the 17th-century Dutch masters.

Velazquez is known to have also painted still lifes without figures, representing "birds, fish, antlers and game with an owl"; but none of those ascribed to him can be authenticated. (Sterling, 1959, p. 75)

Januszczyk also notices that Velazquez had been influenced by Caravaggio's earlier paintings.

The earlier paintings of Velazquez are reminiscent of Caravaggio in their treatment of light and shade, handling of paint and attention to realistic detail. Velazquez always leaned towards a dark and dramatic style of painting. Even in his early genre paintings, however, Velazquez also showed the dispassionate and objective vision which was characteristic of him. (Januszczyk, 1980, p. 48)

Although few preparatory drawings of Velazquez's paintings exist, it is probable that some were made. Preliminary studies in oil were often done. This is seen in the care and detail with which many of Velazquez's paintings are executed. Januszczyk explains Velazquez's technique in his book.

Many of Velazquez's canvases show that he frequently made minor alterations during painting. As he painted, he frequently wiped his brush clean on the canvas, which he later covered over as can be seen in some of his early pictures.

Velazquez probably tempered his pigments with linseed oil of a reasonable fluid consistency, only using a thicker medium for dabs of highlight. The smooth, blended brushwork in many of Velazquez's paintings indicate that, like Caravaggio, Velazquez preferred to use soft hair brushes rather than coarse bristle ones. (Januszczak, 1980, p. 48)

"The Water Seller of Seville" was painted in Seville around 1620. (Figures 7 and 8) It was rendered in oil on canvas size 42 x 31 4/5 inches and was one of a series of works featuring ordinary people, eating and drinking in dark interiors. The light source in this painting is not made known. The viewer cannot tell whether the light source is a window, a candle, a lamp or some mysterious source.

In his analysis of "The Water Seller of Seville" Januszczak observes the following.

1. Velazquez often chose fine, regular weave canvas which he covered with a dark brown ground using a palette knife.
2. The main composition and areas of light and dark would be blocked in using a fairly large bristle brush.

3. Using softer brushes, Velazquez would develop the somewhat roughly applied large areas of color.

4. The softness of the water seller's tunic suggests that Velazquez went over the area with a blending brush.

5. Small details, like the ridges on the pitchers, would be added with a fine pointed brush probably made of ermine or stoat. (Januszczak, 1980, p. 48)

In studying the painting, "The Water Seller of Seville," it seems that Velazquez chose a limited palette consisting of burnt sienna, yellow ochre, black and white. Januszczak agrees when he says:

The composition, with its rich ochres, earth tones, and careful attention to detail are all reminiscent of Caravaggio and show his influence on Velazquez.

In 'The Water Seller of Seville' a striking, yet serene composition is achieved by the choice of warm, harmonious earth colors and the careful arrangement of large, simple shapes to form a triangle, of which the water seller's head is the apex. (Januszczak, 1980, p. 49)

Jose Lopez-Rey discusses "The Water Seller" in his book, Velazquez.

In 'The Water Seller,' the subtlest of greenish tints tinges the figures and objects, notably those in the foreground. The vender hands a glass of water, with a fig for freshening it at the bottom, to a lad as another youth--his figure just shadowed forth--drinks from a jar. The shapes and expressions of the three men are not more vivid, or less

quiet, than the watery film shimmering on the stopper of the jug, or the three drops of water which trickle down its side, or the interplay of transparencies which intensely define the glass, the water and the figure within. (Lopez-Rey, 1963, p. 30)

Januszczak feels that the vessels in the painting, which occurred frequently in Velazquez's works at that time, were almost certainly studio props. (Januszczak, 1980, p. 49) Careful rendering of the vessels suggests that oil studies may have been made first in the studio.

Although the transparent water glass occupies only a small portion of the composition in comparison with the other containers and the people, it is an important integral part of the scene. The manner in which the artist has handled the water glass is unsurpassed. With a minimal amount of paint on the edges of the glass he has allowed the dark background of the boy's clothing to show through and effect the illusion of transparency. Thin light grey brush strokes were applied with a soft brush, with certain areas left unfinished for the eye to complete. In a few chosen places, the artist placed dabs of thicker white pigment for accent. Also, a darker rim of pigment which appears to be black was placed along the bottom of the stem. These few simple strokes so carefully rendered show Velazquez's superb craftsmanship in depicting an elegant example of transparent



glassware. Januszcak comments on the manner in which the artist has painted the water glass:

The interest in the effect of light on the glass is reminiscent of Caravaggio, and the delicate way it is painted points toward the finer, lighter technique developed by Velazquez later in his career. (Januszcak, 1980, p. 51)

Julius S. Held and Donald Posner write in their book, 17th and 18th Century Art, that Velazquez was a young man when he painted "Old Woman Cooking Eggs." (Figure 9)

'Old Woman Cooking Eggs' was painted when Velazquez was only nineteen. . . . the painting has a technical virtuosity that completely overshadows the work of contemporary Spanish painters. . . . and was portrayed with fine objective realism. . . . (Held and Posner, n. d., p. 180)

'Old Woman Cooking Eggs' is dated 1618. The half-length figures emerging from the dark background, the strong chiaroscuro, and the unmitigated realism of figural types and of still-life details are largely derived from Caravaggio's style. However, neither Caravaggio nor any of his followers ever approached everyday scenes with Velazquez's sovereign sense of detachment. For Velazquez, the forms do not exist as parts of a meaningful event, and there is, indeed, a strange lack of dramatic or psychological connection between the figures. The objects, whether human figures or inanimate things, seem to be only optical data for an exercise in the poetry of naturalistic techniques of representation. Indeed, it is just Velazquez's dispassionate attitude toward low life, involving neither mockery nor sympathy, combined with his feeling for poise and balance in the arrangement of shapes, of illuminated surfaces, of



colors, and of textures, that gives this bodegon (eating house) its impressive, even noble character. (Held and Posner, n. d., pp. 179-180)

Although Held and Posner did not deal specifically with the figures or objects in the painting, this writer would like to comment on the transparent glassware container held by the boy. It appears to be a cruet of oil used for frying the eggs. Velazquez rendered the transparent cruet in much the same manner in which he handled the transparent water goblet in "The Water Seller of Seville." In both paintings, the background is extremely dark, and Velazquez relied on brush strokes of white or very light pigment to develop the shapes of the transparent glass containers.

Other paintings containing transparent glassware which Velazquez completed between 1617 and 1618 are "The Luncheon" (The Meal), which hangs in Budapest: Museum of Fine Arts of Hungary, and "The Musicians," which is located in West Berlin: Staatliche Museum. Like "The Water Seller of Seville" and "Old Woman Cooking Eggs," these also are painted on dark backgrounds. All four paintings contain people who are in the process of eating, drinking, or preparing to eat or drink.

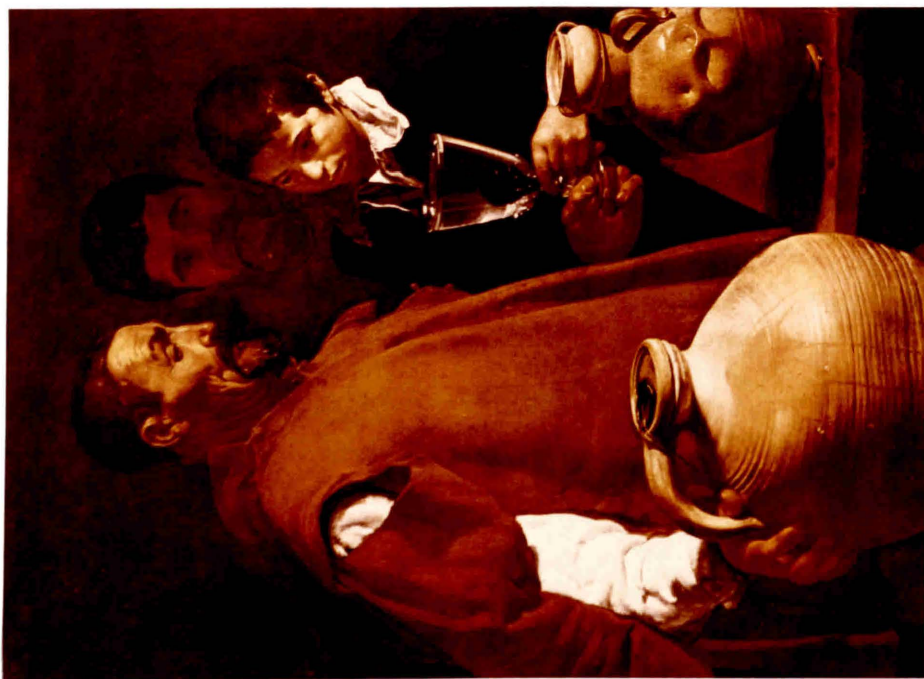


Figure 7. VELAZQUEZ  
"THE WATER SELLER OF SEVILLE"



Figure 8. VELAZQUEZ  
DETAIL OF "WATER SELLER OF SEVILLE"



Figure 9. VELAZQUEZ  
DETAIL OF "OLD WOMAN COOKING EGGS"

## CHAPTER VII.

### DUTCH -- HEDA, CLAESZ AND REMBRANDT

The Dutch painters referred to in this chapter are Willem Claesz Heda (1593-1682), Pieter Claesz (1597-1661), and Rembrandt Van Rijn (1606-1669). These seventeenth-century artists were prolific still life painters and all three included transparent glassware as their subject matter. Examples of their work are shown in Figures 10 through 14.

Paul Zucker writes about the visual selectivity of the Dutch seventeenth-century painters in his book, Styles in Painting, a Comparative Study.

Dutch seventeenth-century still lifes were distinguished by an extraordinary visual selectivity most unlike the riotous abundance of their Flemish counterparts. Within the frame of this selectivity there was room for the individuality of Willem Claesz Heda, Pieter Claesz . . . and many others.

Claesz's "Breakfast Table" is built upon the contrasts between the masses of food, the glinting glassware, the metallic containers, and the soft fabrics, all swimming in a rich, warm tonality. (Zucker, 1950, p. 269)

Madlyn Millner Kahr discusses Dutch painting in the seventeenth century and particularly, Willem Claesz Heda and Pieter Claesz, in her book, Dutch Painting in the Seventeenth Century.

Among the types of still lifes Dutch painters produced early in the seventeenth century were

what they called 'breakfasts.' . . . These pictures often include bowls of fruit, . . . They are arranged in such a way that we relate them to eating, an association that is supported in many cases by the utensils and cutlery that accompany the foods. Often, in fact, it appears as if someone is or has been eating the simple meal.

The early breakfast piece . . . gave equal emphasis to all the objects. Humble tableware, mainly of pewter and pottery, and commonplace food and drink, such as apples, bread, cheese, and glasses of beer, were major constituents of these compositions. . . . They usually showed the table from a high viewpoint.

In the course of time, compositions with a lower viewpoint began to prevail, with the objects drawn up more or less in rows. In the 'Breakfast Still Life' dated 1629 by Willem Claesz Heda, though there is still considerable attention to the individual objects, they are related compositionally in an effective way, by means of intersecting diagonals. The colors likewise are more harmonious than in the earlier breakfast pieces. The even distribution of light contributes to the distinctness of each element and the sense of an accumulation of separate items. In virtually all compositions of this type, . . . the table is parallel to the picture plane, with its forward edge very far forward. . . . Objects projecting over the edge of the table -- often a plate and a long spiral of lemon peel -- seem to bring the images even closer to us. This spatial illusionism was to be continued in the later breakfast pieces as well as in the lavish still-life subjects of the second half of the century. (Kahr, 1978, pp. 195-196)

Kahr maintains that the two leading Dutch still-life painters were Willem Claesz Heda and Pieter Claesz. It is not certain which was the innovator, but both tended

toward more unified monochrome compositions. Both were very productive. She writes about Pieter Claesz's early work.

His earliest known dated work is in the style of the breakfast piece, with fruits, wine, and utensils in strong colors lined up and studied individually. Within two years he had begun to unify both composition and colors and to experiment with distinctive representations of different textures. Before 1630 he had found his mature style, a style imbued with calm, moderation, and harmony. (Kahr, 1978, p. 196)

Kahr feels that the "Breakfast" paintings were intended to exert a moral exhortation.

Most of the paintings of Pieter Claesz were in the category the Dutch call 'Ontbijtje,' or 'Breakfast.' It is not unlikely that such pictures were intended to exert subtle moral exhortation, as their simplicity and austerity may be understood to extol a temperate life. The virtuosity of Claesz in representing contrasting textures and especially reflective qualities in great variety provides visual riches that are all the more appealing in their unassertiveness. (Kahr, 1978, p. 197)

Kahr attributes Chardin's inspiration in the following century partly to Pieter Claesz.

We can enjoy the honest plainness of the pictures without being deprived of the sensuous charm of which oil paints are capable. It is easy to see in the works of this great artist the painterly qualities that were to inspire the French painter Chardin in the following century. (Kahr, 1978, p. 197)

Claesz's style and use of color is noted by Kahr in her book.

Clear organization is characteristic of the compositions of Claesz and his contemporaries. . . . The unification through light and color . . . is also typical of the best works of the tonal period. . . . Claesz's brushwork is vigorous and varied, making the most of the contrasting textures of the carefully selected elements in his painting. (Kahr, 1978, p. 198)

A change was noted in Claesz's later paintings as well as his contemporaries.

Toward the end of the 1630s the still lifes of Pieter Claesz and his contemporaries tended to include more elaborate objects in more complex arrangements. Richer colors, too, began to prevail. From 1640 to the middle of the century and onward, a taste for luxury evident in Dutch painting in general had a striking impact on still life subjects, and the masters of the tonal period adapted to the new fashion. The 'banquet piece' replaced the 'breakfast piece' in popular favor. (Kahr, 1978, p. 198)

Although Kahr spent several pages describing in detail the compositions, colors and elements that made up the paintings of Heda and Claesz, she ignored the most outstanding objects in their paintings -- the fine examples of transparent goblets and glasses that were so conspicuously prominent. She may have been referring to the glassware when she wrote, ". . . and especially reflective qualities in great variety". . . , but it is unclear. Her

only real reference to glassware is "the overturned empty glass" as a symbol of the brevity of life on earth. Heda and Claesz both depicted overturned empty glasses in their paintings.

Broken glassware was shown in both Heda and Stoskopff's paintings. One authority made this comment about Heda's "Breakfast Still Life."

. . . The human context of these grouped objects, is suggested by the broken glass, the half-peeled lemon, the overturned silver dish; whoever sat at this table has been suddenly forced to abandon his meal. The curtain that time has lowered on the scene, as it were, invests the objects with a strange pathos. (Janson, 1970, p. 430)

In 1952 the Corning Museum of Glass in New York held an exhibition of glass vessels in Dutch painting of the seventeenth century. This period and source were chosen by the museum because it was felt that the artists concerned had mastered the problem of representing glass in two dimensions. Thomas S. Buechner, Director of The Corning Museum of Glass has published a book explaining the paintings and the glass vessels in the exhibit. One important premise displayed on the introductory panel at the exhibit is as follows:

Man's ability in representing glass is measured by his realization that glass transmits and reflects as well as absorbs light. (Buechner, 1952, p. 10)



The Romans may not have understood this concept, since they relied purely on linearism for the definition of their transparent glassware. Buechner states that the evolution of this type of observation and technical mastery took at least four centuries, and as late as the thirteenth century "glass was represented by an outline confining a monotonal area, the top of which corresponds to the level a liquid would assume." (Buechner, 1952, p.11) Later renderings of transparent glassware are described.

A century or so later, the desire to create an illusion of three dimensional form governed the rendering of vessels of all kinds. . . . Combining both line and form, with the contents plainly visible, Leonardo da Vinci was apparently aware that glass turned away light as well as absorbed it. All glass vessels have high lights which follow the exterior of the form in a single unbroken line. There is no evidence that the nature of the light source was understood, but its location was definitely planned and consistently adhered to. (Beuchner, 1952, p. 11)

The Dutch began using transparent glass vessels for inanimate models.

Having the model close at hand, as familiar to his patrons as to himself, the Dutch artist was forced to produce a new concept of artistic creation, emphasizing static abstract composition and realistic representation; . . . (Beuchner, 1952, p. 13)

Required realism, often unhappily rated high above aesthetics, demanded scientifically exact observation. The result, in the rendering of glass, approaches photographic perfection. The gradual absorption by men of art of new discoveries concerning light may be partly responsible. In any case, the depicted vessels reflect not only light but the actual appearance of the source of light; the transparent glass transmits light to other objects, absorbing part from the source as well as from light reflected by other objects. This accuracy of representation enables the glass enthusiast to identify a given vessel with considerable precision. (Beuchner, 1952, pp. 13-14)

Four different types of glass vessels were mainly depicted in the Dutch paintings.

Glass vessels, with their great variety of form and design, provided a range of models which every painter of the period made use of. The most common of these was the roemer. Passglases and flutes, the latter usually with a Venetian style stem, were frequently copied. (Buechner, 1952, p. 14)

The roemer was a good-looking, functional, drinking vessel. Buechner describes two kinds of roemers which appear in the Dutch paintings:

. . . The tall elegant variety with the long cylindrical stem and ovoid semispherical bowl and a rather squat counterpart with a straight-sided conical bowl. The former usually occupies a prominent center-of-interest position; well proportioned, the lines describing its form do not tend to direct the eye of the observer away. The flaring bowl on the shorter one, however, causes the eye to travel away from it, and therefore it usually plays a supporting role. Both forms are used as verticals,

with the large one usually dominating the composition. (Buechner, 1952, p. 16)

The short roemer with the flaring bowl was a favorite object in Pieter Claesz's work. Figures 10 and 11 both depict the short roemer. The design and decoration of the roemer was based on the Roman drinking cup.

Based on the Roman drinking cup . . . it developed as the lip was exaggerated to form a bowl, the original bowl assuming the function of a stem. . . . The inevitable decoration on the roemer is also of Roman origin. Little gobs of glass were dotted on the outside of patellas and oil lamps in the 2nd century A.D. These same gobs, now called prunts, adorn the 17th century roemer. . . . Tiny reflections from the prunts relieve the dark area with variegated flashes of light. (Buechner, 1952, p. 16)

Buechner observed that, "Willem Claesz Heda must have owned a roemer with an unusually elongated bowl, as it appears in several of his still life paintings."

(Buechner, 1952, p. 18) This roemer is shown in two of his paintings. (Figures 12 and 13)

Buechner describes one of Pieter Claesz's paintings which was a part of the Corning Museum Exhibition.

Four of Claesz's famous pewter plates adorn a table laden with seafood. A handsome silver spouted pot is the prominent vertical, balanced on the right by a squat roemer and on the left by a passglas, which completes the simple diagonal on which the composition has been based. A very simple vessel, the

passglas usually appears as a cylindrical silhouette relieved by vertical linear high lights. (Buechner, 1952, p. 21)

(This still life painting by Claesz is shown in Figure 10.)

As the name implies, this drinking glass was originally passed around but the genre paintings . . . indicate that by the 17th century there were enough for each drinker to have his own. Generally decorated with applied glass threading, often in a series of bands, the passglas was equipment for a drinking game. Each participant was required to gulp to a specific band; if he missed, he proceeded to the next band. . . . the raucous nature of the barroom scenes in which this glass appears suggests that it was used by the drinker who meant business. (Buechner, 1952, p. 21)

The passglas was included in one of Rembrandt's paintings. (Figure 14)

Rembrandt painted a portrait of himself with his wife Saskia on his knee, holding aloft a large passglas. In contrast to the rich trappings and costumes, its presence might infer popularity among a more prosperous class of people. This inference is not substantiated by other painters and is perhaps more indicative of the character of Rembrandt than of the usage of the passglas. (Buechner, 1952, p. 21)

Bob Haak in his book, Rembrandt: His Life, Work and Times, has some comments to make on the same painting.

It is incorrect to consider as an example of Rembrandt's bohemian existence the famous painting in Dresden in which he portrayed himself with Saskia on his knee. Writers on Rembrandt usually consider this painting

a domestic scene in which the young couple glory in their gay and light-hearted life. A number of scholars, however, concentrating on the deeper meaning of ostensibly realistic seventeenth-century art, have pointed out that Rembrandt's intention was probably exactly the opposite: in analogy with the Prodigal Son theme of a wasted life, he is here warning against rather than glorifying extravagance and frivolity. (Haak, 1969, p. 152-153)

Haak proposes that the clue to the setting of the painting is a panel in the upper left portion of the painting. The panel is a tally-plank used by innkeepers to chalk up the names of their customers and the number of drinks they had. The setting, then, is a tavern and not a livingroom as some have supposed. Also, the peacock pie on the table is thought to be a symbol of pride and sensual pleasure, as are the ostrich feathers on Rembrandt's beret. The fact that the artist gave the man his own features and the woman those of his wife is corollary to the idea that in every person there is a Prodigal Son needing God's mercy.

Flute glasses were popular still-life items for several Dutch painters. Buechner describes the flute glass as being "a tall slender cone, usually set on a short stem with a fairly wide foot." He says that the flute glass is used for much the same purpose as the pass-glas, which is a tavern glass. A flute glass is shown in

Willem Claesz Heda's still life painting in Figure 13. It is the tallest object in a well-arranged triangular-shaped composition.





Figure 10. PIETER CLAESZ  
STILL LIFE WITH SHORT ROEMER AND PASSGLAS



Figure 11. PIETER CLAESZ  
STILL LIFE WITH SHORT ROEMER AND FLAGON





Figure 12. WILLEM CLAESZ HEDA  
STILL LIFE WITH ELONGATED ROEMER



Figure 13. WILLEM CLAESZ HEDA  
STILL LIFE WITH ELONGATED ROEMER AND FLUTE GLASS





Figure 14. REMBRANDT  
"SELF PORTRAIT WITH SASKIA"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### FRENCH -- STOSKOPFF, CHARDIN, AND MANET

The French painters included in this study are Sebastian Stoskopff (1597-1657), Jean Baptiste Simeon Chardin (1699-1779) and Edouard Manet (1832-1883). Examples of their work are shown in Figures 15 through 19. Although these three artists were all Frenchmen who at one time or another included transparent glassware in their paintings, they had little else in common. Their lives spanned different generations, and neither lived during the lifetime of the others. Their styles and techniques were all different from each other.

Sebastian Stoskopff was from Alsace, a region in northeast France, although some sources referred to him as a German painter. His paintings containing fine transparent crystalware were some of the most exquisite in this study. They were not incidental to the arrangement, but were of primary importance and were rendered with a finesse unequaled during his time.

Although several examples of his paintings appeared in books, it was difficult to find sufficient written information regarding Stoskopff's work. The Encyclopedia of World Art tells that most of his works

have been brought together in Strasbourg, France, and that initially he painted Flemish and German motifs, but later was influenced by the Parisians after which he achieved "clearer and simpler statements, more delicately articulated in a rediscovered spatial dimension."

Sterling is another authority who claims that Stoskopff was influenced by the Flemish and the French:

The Flemish colony that settled in the Rhineland, at Frankfort and Hanau, had a decisive influence on . . . the Alsatian Sebastian Stoskopff, Faustian wizard of evanescent gleams of light on glass, who later came under the influence of French taste in Paris. (Sterling, 1959, p. 48)

Describing Stoskopff and other French painters of his day, Sterling states:

In dealing with the expansion throughout Europe of the archaic type of still life, I had to allow considerable space to French productions. . . . They showed a spirit of synthesis in their still lifes . . . by reducing the number of objects represented, by clarifying the composition, by softening the vigor of local tones, by contriving subtle passages of delicate modeling between forms. An elegant simplicity often distinguishes the pictures of Stoskopff from the soberest Flemish work. . . . (Sterling, 1959, p. 78)

French painters were groping for their way. It may well have been Stoskopff, a complex, impressionable artist whose pictorial culture owed as much to an essentially Germanic linearism as to a purified taste acquired in Paris,

who had the most direct contacts with the art of the Low Countries, and who was best equipped to assimilate the new trends. He failed, however, to follow a coherent line of evolution. In 1644 he painted both the archaic "Basket of Rinsed Glasses" in Strasbourg Museum and the "Dish of Grapes with a Glass of Wine," whose composition is already comparable to that of Claesz. . . . (Sterling, 1959, p. 780)

His painting, "Basket of Rinsed Glasses" is shown in Figure 15. In this painting Stoskopff has accurately depicted the fragile quality of fine crystal in his delicate use of line.

There was one book which seemed to be a substantial book entitled La Nature Morte En France by Michel Fare, but it was written in French. However, the book contained several excellent black and white reproductions of Stoskopff's paintings, all of which depicted transparent glassware as their primary subject matter.

Chardin was born 40 years after Stoskopff's death, and lived his entire life in Paris. Chardin was content to paint the common scenes and objects of daily life. He was able to lift simple people and objects into a painted world of quiet perfection with a sure sense of design, color and texture. Colors used by Chardin were generally low key so that the effect was subdued rather than brilliant. He applied the paint in a mixture of glazes and thick pigment that suggest the textures of his subjects with amazing

accuracy. His paintings are carefully composed, and each form or part has a balanced and proportioned place in the final effect.

Chardin was considered one of the greatest painters of his century. French philosopher, Diderot, was so moved when viewing one of Chardin's paintings that he exclaimed:

This is unfathomable wizardry. Thick coats of color are laid one on top of another, and their effect transpires from below upwards. At other times, one might suppose that a mist had been blown over the canvas; or again, that a light foam had been thrown over it. . . . Draw close, and everything becomes blurred, flattens out and disappears; draw away, and everything is recreated and reproduced. (Sterling, 1959, p. 85)

Critics of Chardin's day sometimes compared him to Rembrandt:

Chardin was known to the critics of his day as "the French Rembrandt" which meant in effect that what they admired in his still lifes was his abrupt, undisguised brush-stroke, which takes the eye by surprise from close at hand and proves to be miraculously accurate when seen from a distance. Without realizing it, they discerned the place he was to occupy in the history of painting, between the old and the modern masters. (Sterling, 1959, p. 88)

Sterling states that Chardin turned for inspiration to the Dutch painters, and like them, painted commonplace objects, usually food and kitchen utensils. This,

Sterling explains, came as a bold novelty after half a century of flowers, trophies, etc.

With motifs similar to those of the Dutch masters, Chardin composed pictures whose plastic harmony is much more complete. . . . Chardin groups his objects with a freedom and subtlety that are quite unprecedented. In Dutch still life painting objects stand close together, touching one another. Chardin draws them apart, but across the air-filled gaps that separate them they are linked together by ties which we feel to be indefeasible. This satisfying effect is not produced by any obvious geometrical pattern. It is a subtle relationship resulting at once from the reciprocal proportions of objects, from their direction in space, from their proximity on the same plane or in recession. The cadences of their grouping distinguish Chardin from the soberest Spanish masters as well as from the Dutch. . . . For though Chardin rendered objects in light and depth only with effort, the composition seems to be the happy result of instinct. (Sterling, 1959, p. 88)

In his compositions, Chardin was influenced by earlier painters.

From the 15th century on, it was a stock device of still life painters to place an object or two on the very edge of a shelf or table, overhanging it and jutting out towards us, thus creating the illusion of three-dimensional space between the spectator and the scene represented. . . . It is hard to find a Dutch, Flemish or Italian still life of the 17th century without a spiraling lemon-peel, a folded napkin or a piece of fruit projecting over the edge of a dish or table. French painters adopted this device, but used it discreetly, almost reluctantly, we feel. Sometimes they

eschewed it; at other times they placed an object on the very edge of the table, as it they had stopped it from falling in the nick of time. Chardin usually did the same. (Sterling, 1959, p. 50)

Sterling maintains that Chardin greatly influenced modern painters.

Of all French artists previous to the 19th century, Chardin, alongside Poussin and Claude Lorrain, is the one who has had the greatest influence on modern painting. . . . Chardin occupies one of the foremost positions in art history. Caravaggio is the first example of a great master who painted independent still life pictures. But Chardin did more: he won recognition as a great master by specializing in what was then considered an inferior branch of art. He baffled the critics of his day. (Sterling, 1959, pp. 88-89)

Several examples of transparent glassware were observed in Chardin's paintings, and in each instance, the glassware seemed to be incidental rather than of primary importance.

According to Held and Posner, there is a painting by Chardin in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C. entitled "Soap Bubbles," (Figure 17) and measuring 36 5/8 x 29 3/8 inches.

Chardin began painting genre subjects in the early 1730s. In this field, too, he revealed the beauty inherent in the commonplace scene. His subjects range from a boy blowing bubbles . . . to a mother listening to her young daughter say grace.

Here, ordinary, everyday things and events are revealed as the bearers of wholesome, honest pleasure. (Held and Posner, n. d., p. 317)

In a book entitled, Masterpieces of Painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a painting is shown that is identical or almost identical to the one described above. It is entitled, "Blowing Bubbles," measures 24 x 24 1/4 inches and is signed in the lower left, J. Chardin. The introduction to this book is by Claus Virch and comments on the paintings are by Edith A. Standen and Thomas M. Folds. Standen and Folds discuss the painting symbolically as follows:

The subject of this picture is the age-old idea that the life of man is as brief as that of a soap bubble. Chardin has reduced it to its simplest terms. He makes us aware of the roundness of the bubble, the shape of the man's head, the pressure of his wrist on the back of his hand, of his arm on the stone ledge. The balanced composition and the restricted color scheme, with little emphasis on the iridescence of the bubble, contribute to the effect of stillness and seriousness, even solemnity. In another second the bubble will break and the man and the child will outlive it only for an insignificant length of time, but Chardin has recorded this trivial, evanescent moment as if it were eternal. (Standen and Folds, 1959, p. 44)

In this painting, the transparent bubble seems to command much more attention than the nearby transparent glass which probably contains soapy water. Chardin's



delicate and careful use of a light hue of paint to partially outline the bubble has made it appear to be very real. The fact that he has left part of the edge of the bubble unfinished adds to the illusive and temporary characteristics of the subject. The transparent glass is developed much more clearly. He has used light pigment on the left side of the glass to contrast with the darker background, and dark pigment on the right side of the glass to contrast with the value of the sleeve of the man. Highlights of white paint on the rim of the glass help depict its round shape.

Figure 16 shows a still life painting by Chardin which includes a transparent glass containing some kind of liquid, along with a large stoneware pitcher and some fruit. This is a typical example of his still lifes.

The next century brought forth several great French artists and among them was Edouard Manet. Although transparent glassware was not the primary subject matter of Edouard Manet's work, it does occur in several of his paintings. As an impressionist, the manner in which Manet handled his brush strokes and applied his colors certainly differed from other artists in this investigative study. His paintings were rendered with a fresh spontaneity which was characteristic of impressionist painters of his time.

In the book, Great Masters of French Impressionism, Diane Kelder wrote a commentary of Manet. She learned that Manet had produced numerous still-life paintings because of his love of the 17th-century Spanish and Dutch schools which excelled in this genre. One painting which she called attention to in her commentary was "Flowers in a Crystal Vase," a small painting which was done in 1882.

This tiny painting projects the vivid freshness of the blossoms, and its concise yet firm brush strokes suggest the speed with which Manet generally executed his still lifes. (Kelder, n. d., p. 16)

The crystal vase in this painting was rendered in much the same manner as the transparent glassware in "The Bar at the Folies-Bergere." (Figures 18 and 19) This was his last major painting before his death at age 51. In the bar painting, transparent glassware appears as the crystal bowl filled with fruit, the vase with two roses, the chandelier, and the bottles on the bar. In his book, A Treasury of Impressionism, Nathaniel Harris discusses this painting.

"The Bar at the Folies-Bergere" was painted in 1882 and shown at the Salon of 1882. By the time he painted this famous picture, Manet was so ill that he worked sitting down. It was done in his studio, with a real barmaid as the model, standing behind a table covered with bottles, glasses and fruit. (Harris, 1979, p. 188)

George Mauner has made an in-depth study of the themes which appear in Manet's paintings in his book, Manet. He speaks of "The Bar at the Folies-Bergere" as "that last masterpiece, which so strongly recalls the enigmatic figure compositions of the 1860s."

The two styles of Manet, the 'form-volume' of the 1860s and the 'color-light' of the 1870s are perfectly fused. (Mauner, n. d., p. 162)

The mirror in this painting does not give the viewer a true reflection. Mauner refers to it as "the mirror of the vanities."

The mirror, in which we cannot see her face, supplies her environment and conversational partner, whose presence we could never have otherwise suspected. The brilliance of the setting with its gilt and crystal chandeliers, the mundane, glittering balcony, and, finally, the gentleman 'client' who draws the maid into contact with the world of the mirror must all identify this looking-glass as the mirror of vanities. (Mauner, n. d., p. 161)

Although Manet seldom painted transparent glassware, the examples of the transparent bowl and bottles in "The Bar at the Folies-Bergere" were so exquisite, they needed to be included in this study.

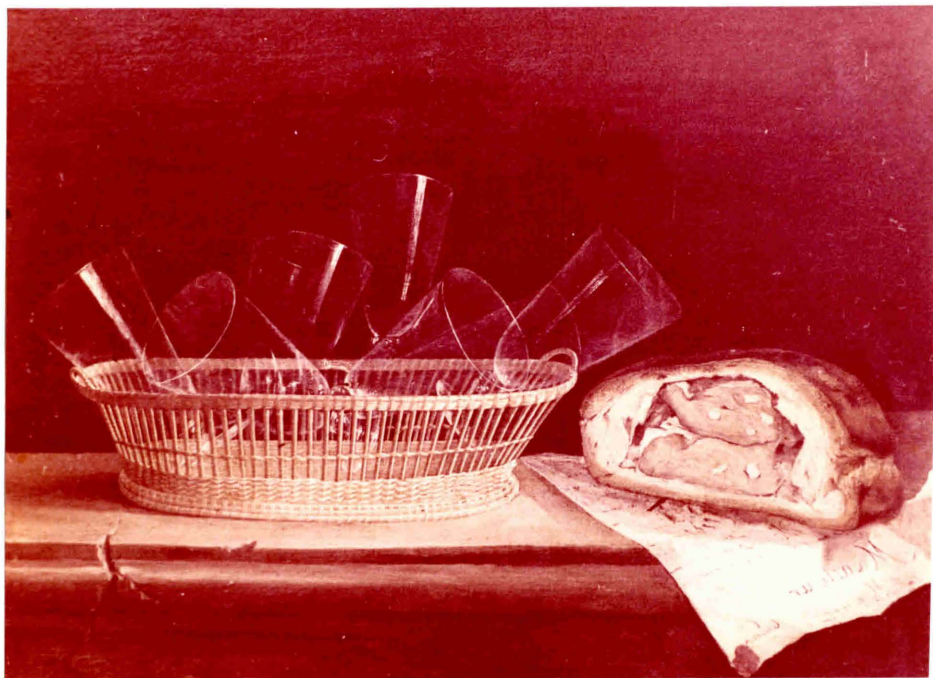


Figure 15. STOSKOPFF  
"BASKET OF RINSED GLASSES"



Figure 16. CHARDIN  
STILL LIFE



Figure 17. CHARDIN  
"SOAP BUBBLES"



Figure 18. MANET  
DETAIL OF "THE BAR AT THE  
FOLIES-BERGERE"

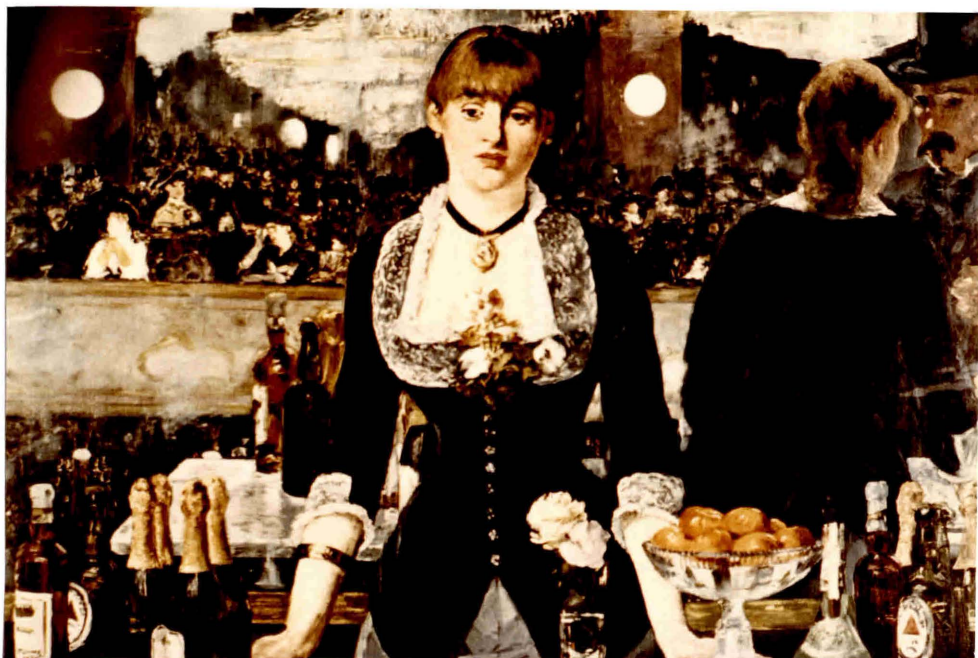


Figure 19. MANET  
"THE BAR AT THE FOLIES-BERGERE"



## CHAPTER IX.

### AMERICAN -- FISH AND ESTES

The American artists included in this study are Janet Fish and Richard Estes, both of whom are dedicated realist painters. Also, in this chapter mention is made of the prodigious Peale family, with one example of a still life by Raphaelle Peale in Figure 24.

Although Janet Fish and Richard Estes are both primarily concerned with glassware in their paintings, their subject matter and compositions are quite different. The glassware in Fish's work consists of bottles, jars, bowls, plates and objects normally found in a kitchen, while the glassware in Estes's work is the sheet glass of store windows. Both are concerned with transparencies and reflections. Fish works from carefully prepared still-life arrangements, and Estes works from selected photographs.

Janet Fish, a native of Boston, Massachusetts, is an accomplished painter who renders oversized transparent glassware on oversized canvases. Examples of her work are shown in Figures 20 through 23.

In an article which appeared in Arts Magazine, author Linda Nochlin says:

Janet Fish, with her battalions of jars, honey-pots, glasses, etc., traffics in the objecthood of ordinary transparent glassware. Their mass-produced curves, their patient, coarse interactions, their elegant

or graceless labels are simply arranged on a shelf or table, with no heart-aches. What, after all, can one coke bottle remind you of besides another coke bottle? . . . Through over-life sized scale and attentive handling, she confers an unprecedented dignity upon the grouped jelly jars or wine-bottles that she renders with such deference. The glassy fruit-or liquid-filled volumes confront us with the hypnotic solemnity of the processional mosaics at Ravenna, and a similar, faceted, surface sparkle. (Nochlin, 1974, p. 50)

Fish works in her well-lighted SoHo loft studio in New York City. Her loft is a 90-by 20-foot area which she divided into a studio and a living space. Soon after she moved into her loft, Fish painted the floor and the tin ceiling white, insulated the living area and replaced one of the paned windows with a single sheet of glass.

"I paint what I see," she explained to her Art News interviewer, "and I wanted to give myself different visual options. I used to set up so that nothing showed. Now I am even painting the street." Her many "props" are glasses picked up at flea markets. (Slesin, 1978, p. 66)

Cindy Nemser discusses the close-up vision in representational art in the Arts Magazine. Janet Fish is named, as well as several others, as an artist whose paintings are close to the early Roman and later Dutch concepts of the still life with artificial arrangements and individual concern for accurate illusionistic portrayal of



isolated objects. Nemser further writes:

We discover through their close-up vantage point that light hitting the surface of translucent materials such as glass, cellophane, or gelatin can spur an artist on to breath-taking depictions comparable to those inspired by the unspoiled products of nature. . . . These minutely observed objects, despite their exaggerated size and close-up placement, do not threaten or overwhelm us. (Nemser, 1972, p. 48)

In the May 1979 issue of Arts Magazine, Ellen Lubell writes that Janet Fish has always painted the intangible qualities of the transparent. Not only has she included clusters of transparent bottles, drinking glasses, bowls and jars in her work, but also cellophane covered fruits and vegetables from the supermarket. She is keenly interested in the characteristics of light, color and reflections. Often she arranges still life compositions on reflective surfaces for more interesting or complex effects. Sometimes these are set in front of windows that bring in urban shapes into the scenes. The combination of crystal and architecture make an unusual, yet harmonious effect. Hues from an architectural background are transmitted by the curves of the glassware beyond the actual area they occupy. Lubell explains that there is a lyrical compositional link between the outdoor environment, the buildings, and the interior environment, the glassware.

The almost musical lilting of color as it wafts from one glass to another is an embroidery of fact that is a lyrical compositional link. . . . The New York architectural environment is most successful in 'Spring Evening.' A hazy, soft yellow light coats the painterly industrial buildings seen at roof level, providing ample space for the sky. The buildings are suggestions that successfully recede from our consciousness in comparison to the glasses. The latter, a selection of ornate water goblets, carry the yellow and blue light, and indicate other buildings and colors whose direct view they block. (Lubell, 1979, p. 21)

Another painting which Fish has completed in a similar limited palette is "Morning." Writer Ellen Lubell explains how Fish edits the scenes in her compositions.

This work demonstrates beautifully how the faceting and curving of the crystal patterns can attune an entire painting, and how the artist edits the scenes; when something interesting happens, she makes way for it. For example, in this composition, Fish dismisses the faceting of the front of a glass to provide an uninterrupted glimpse of a compressed, tiny cityscape hanging upside down in the still water. The phenomenon is an exquisite moment in this still life. One searches for these moments--and is amply rewarded. (Lubell, 1979, p. 21)

Lubell says that Fish's power of illumination is perhaps her greatest talent; that she has the ability to bring the air around the colored glasses alive with their coloration. Although light remains her primary concern, Fish sometimes displays a change in subject matter to include opaque objects in contrast with transparent objects.

Some of her later paintings which are concerned with more concrete objects rather than the concept of light and reflections operate on a different aesthetic plane than her earlier paintings. However, they do not completely forsake light. Lubell talks about one of Fish's later paintings.

'Goldfish Fantasy, August,' for example, contains a wide-mouthed iridescent glass painted as bands of concentric circles of color: mauves, turquoise, yellow, green violet. The fishbowl reflects blues, the orange of the fish, and displays a fully prismatic rainbow. (Lubell, 1979, p. 21)

Eleanor Tufts, in her article in Arts Magazine, suggests that there is a return to the non-sensational values of still-life phenomenology as realist painters like Janet Fish, with her gaint glass flasks, emerge on the American scene. Tufts quotes Janet Fish as saying:

There is an aspect about painting still lifes that is like contemplation or meditation. You sit there with something very quiet. You are looking at it all day and you are constantly pushing out though the thing you are looking at. (Tufts, 1977, p. 142)

Tufts believes that periodically, society feels the need to confirm that there is a more tranquil pace of life, and that this is reflected in painting.

Cyclically in the history of painting there emerges an impulse to monumentalize and venerate objects that represent everyday life. Between agitated periods of

history, society feels the need to confirm that there is a non-hectic pace of life. Thus enter the Pompeii wall paintings, . . . the Renaissance interiors, Dutch 17th-century genre scenes, flower pieces of Holland and Spain, and recently . . . the renewal of an emphasis on daily imagery. Now Fish . . . and others are doing it again. Fish and Flack magnify in their canvases of large physical dimensions, selected mundane objects that have attracted their attention and people like it. . . . Here are objects which the ordinary beholder can understand, blown up larger than life with a fine, sensuous quality in the paint. (Tufts, 1977, p. 143)

Tufts ponders the question: Did earlier painters find a needed refuge in the phenomenology of common objects? "Yes," she says, "Consider the case of Luis Melendez."

With a powerful plasticity and clarity of form Melendez articulated the simple utensils and food in his Madrid home. The humble objects are placed in a close, often contiguous arrangement on a plain wooden table. The integrity of his simply presented, lovingly rendered fruits and dishes has inescapable appeal. . . . Opting for a very small and intimate pictorial repertoire, Melendez created silent poems of metaphysical poise which calm and reassure the viewer. (Tufts, 1977, p. 143)

All basic elements of design are noted in his paintings, but Melendez shows a preference for the circular shape, which appears repeatedly in his work.

The writer was not able to locate any color reproductions of Melendez's work, but a black and white

reproduction of "Box of Jellied Fruit" appeared in several publications. (Figure 25)

When comparing Melendez's austere 18th-century world to that of affluent 20th-century America, there are some affinities in the manner of seeing things. Volume, rhythm and use of light are elements which are apparent in the works of many American artists. Janet Fish most emphatically recalls Melendez in her letter to Eleanor Tufts:

I have been interested in Melendez for a number of years. It is hard for me to express the interest I have in Spanish still life. It is the attitude, the formality. The objects are perceived with such dignity and quiet. I like the close attention to specific ephemeral forms combined with the strict structuring of the canvas. For me these paintings are more truly mystical--religious (for lack of better words) in feeling than more literal depictions of saints and holy events. (Tufts, 1977, p. 144)

Although Luis Melendez's shiny reflective surfaces predate Janet Fish's sparkling prisms by 200 years, Eleanor Tufts makes some interesting observations comparing the two. Some similarities are as follows:

Both Melendez and Fish let their objects scintillate in the foreground, leaving the background as a neutral foil. They share an interest in the transparency of glass and in subtle reflections. Fish shows a special fascination not only for liquids contained in glass but also for the mirroring of the foremost bottles on the table-top. The two artists have in common a passion

for verisimilitude: Fish even portrays the purple pricemarks stamped on some of the bottlecaps, just as Melendez scrupulously records the nicks in his omnipresent table. (Tufts, 1977, p. 144)

Main differences between Melendez and Fish are their choices in subject matter and treatment of space.

Fish usually selects one generic item which is represented several times in a single composition. It is seen in manifold views, exhibiting a variety of facets and testifying to the artist's visual ingenuity. Fish and Melendez also diverge in their treatment of space. She tends to place her glass subjects in two rows, whereas he moves his disparate objects tangentially back into space, establishing several planes. (Tufts, 1977, p. 144)

Tufts comments that the 18th and the 20th-century artists are both monumentalizing the everyday object, glorifying it at the center of a vibrating cosmo-composition. A 19th-century link between the two, Tufts continues, is the prodigious Peale family of Philadelphia. Their still-life arrangements of food and dishes are set like totems on starkly plain tabletops. One example of Raphaele Peale's work is shown in Figure 24. One can observe the artist's confrontation with humble dignity. His composition consists of a basket filled with oranges, raisins, grapes and almonds. A sparkling goblet stands nearby, and in the foreground the artist has placed a cross-section of an orange with its spiraling peel, which is

reminiscent of earlier Dutch paintings, particularly those of Heda and Claesz.

Jane Cottingham, a writer for the American Artist magazine, describes Janet Fish's studio in the October issue.

A brief glance around confirms who works here. Still-life arrangements are bathed in light from enormous windows. A palette of oil paints, with a menu of delicious colors, is cradled in aluminum next to jars of well-worn brushes. There are heaps of glassware and dishes--Depression glass, Fiesta ware, crystal, cranberry glass, and five-and ten sugar bowls stacked like prizes in a penny arcade. They are the components, the props Janet Fish culls for her still-life arrangements. Fish transforms these banal objects into stunning realist paintings that shimmer and gleam like chips of shaved ice. (Cottingham, 1982, p. 45)

Fish's early paintings were landscapes, but she gradually focused on objects, and later became a perceptual realist depicting glassware. She is intrigued with reflections and the play of light on glassware.

Crystal wineglasses and cut glass tumblers on mirrored surfaces . . . showed her fascination for high activity of reflections and the way light splinters into tiny intricate sections. (Cottingham, 1982, p. 90)

Although she does not feel that she works in series, Fish does a number of paintings on a single subject, working from painting to painting. "Each painting," she says, "corrects the mistakes from the last."

While Fish's compositions are about light and shapes, primarily, they also are concerned with color.

Her palette recalls the colors of the French Impressionists, with purples deep and lusty, luminous blues and reds that range from deep, votive candle-red to the ginger-red of her own hair. She selects from a range of colors that skeptics challenge as exaggerated. However, says Fish, 'People in New York think I make up color, but I don't exaggerate. Colors are bright when the sun is shining on them.' (Cottingham, 1982, p. 94)

In the early 1970's Janet Fish completed several paintings of bottles with varying amounts of liquid, and some of the bottles had labels. Of these paintings, she remembers:

I got tired of people reading the labels. I was focusing on distortions, reflections, and the play of movement, not the lettering, so, I moved on to glasses of water as subject matter. (Cottingham, 1982, p. 90)

Fish spends a great deal of time setting up a still life arrangement and preparing for the composition. She gathers together compatible objects that have an intriguing color relationship and studies them. She admits, "I push shapes around and experiment for a few days on the object."

She surrounds herself with the objects, contemplating their compositions and shapes. She then begins to paint, without first drawing in the subjects as most other realist artists do. That directness is typical of her no-nonsense approach to art. She loves to paint, to be alone with her art and 'challenge' her last work. . . . An oil painting usually takes two months of working



an eight-hour day in natural light.  
(Cottingham, 1982, p. 94)

In the late 1970's Fish's paintings began to bring the view beyond the still life. During this time she began to paint not only the still life before her, but also everything she saw outside her window in her neighborhood. Reflections from the glassware or from her window connect the foreground with background in overlapping and tangled segments of light and form. The backdrop to her crystal glasses and mirrored table is sometimes architecture and sometimes sky.

In Cottingham's article, she concludes:

Janet Fish, who likes to be referred to as a perceptual realist, makes paintings that are a joy for the senses. Her enormous panoramas, filled with a banquet of color and tactility, make the viewer glad the artist chose to be a painter. (Cottingham, 1982, p. 95)

One of Janet Fish's contemporaries is Richard Estes who photographs and paints scenes of the city, with special emphasis on store windows. Estes was born in Evanston, Illinois. Although he is considered a photo-realist, his imagery does not exactly parallel that of the realist movement. Examples of his work are shown in Figures 26 and 27.

In Contemporary Artists, editors Naylor and P-Orridge describe Estes's work as far more painterly than

that of other artists labeled as photo-realists.

One has only to look closely at a work by Estes to see how richly painted it is. The pigment is applied with considerable painterly virtuoso handling of the brush here and there. (Naylor and P-Orridge, 1977, p. 284)

Estes's primary interest is the depiction of the cityscape or urban landscape, while making use of reflections in store windows. This allows the viewer to become aware of what is behind as well as in front of him.

Naylor and P-Orridge note that Estes pays careful attention to the elements and principles of design, although he uses a camera in his work.

Just because Estes refers to photographs for pictorial information doesn't preclude his profound interest in composition, drawing, color and form. . . . This interest in picture-making has caused him to edit a great deal. In no way is he a slave to the image captured by his camera. He applies geometry to his compositions and balances out his complex scenes. (Naylor and P-Orridge, 1977, p. 285)

In an interview for Art in America magazine, Linda Chase and Ted McBurnett pose some straight-forward questions to Estes concerning the use of the camera in his work. He was asked, "When did you start using photographs?" He replied that he started using photographs after he was out of school because there were no more models. At first his photographs included groups of people --

crowds, which he also put into his paintings. At the time, he did not feel it was right. He felt it was too literal and that he was putting too much information in front of the viewer. Later he began deleting the people from his paintings even if they were in the photographs. He often took several photographs of the same scene and composed his painting from a combination of them.

He was questioned, "Could it be possible to make the same paintings from life?" and his response was:

I couldn't do it. It's not possible. The great thing about the photograph is that you can stop things--this one instant. You certainly couldn't do that if you went out there and set yourself up in front of it. (Chase and McBurnett, 1972, p. 79)

When asked, "Do you draw from slides?" he replied:

I project the slides to look at them, blow up details so I can see very clearly exactly what's happening. I don't project them on the canvas though. (Chase and McBurnett, 1972, p. 79)

He was asked if he changed the photograph a lot:

I don't try to change things. I try to make them a little clearer, that's all--to show what's happening. If something is in front of something else, I try to really make it look in front of it. Sometimes a photograph, if you really examine it, can be not very realistic. It doesn't fully explain the way things really are or how they really look. . . . Sometimes it flattens things out and sometimes it doesn't.

There is no consistency in the way it flattens things out. It's not organized. (Chase and McBurnett, 1972, p. 79)

The interviewers suggested that reflections have taken the place of movement in New Realist paintings, and that everything seems to be standing still. Estes's response to that statement was:

I think that's true of all painting. It's always standing still-- but maybe it seems that way in New Realist painting because if you paint inanimate objects like a car, whether its moving or whether it's still, it doesn't look any different. Whereas if you paint figures there are certain things we associate with movement. It's an intellectual thing you read into it. (Chase and McBurnett, 1972, p. 79)

When asked how he used focus in his work, Estes replied:

There are certain things that have to be fuzzy. . . The eye sees like that. When I look at things, some are out of focus. I don't like to have some things out of focus and others in focus because it makes very specific what you are supposed to look at and I try to avoid saying that. I want you to look at it all. Everything is in focus. (Chase and McBurnett, 1972, p. 79)

As a Realist painter of cityscapes, Estes was asked about painting garbage and things of that nature on the street. His reply was:

I only eliminate garbage because I couldn't really get it to look right. It's really a technical deficiency on my part. I really try to make things look dirty, but it's

interesting because even in a photograph it doesn't look as dirty as it really is. (Chase and McBurnett, 1972, p. 79)

In referring to Estes's architectural subject matter of buildings and store windows, the interviewers commented, "Your paintings seem to have the effect of making the viewer see things differently, making the subject beautiful or interesting. Is that your intention?"

In response, he said:

I have no conscious intention of making people see differently. . . . I enjoy painting it because of all the things I can do with it. I'm not trying to make propaganda for New York, or anything. I think I would tear down most of the places I paint. (Chase and McBurnett, 1972, p. 79)

Finally, Estes was asked if he thought it was true that beautiful things often don't make very interesting subjects.

That's true. Even if I were goint to paint figures I wouldn't look for beautiful people to paint. It's interesting, its very difficult to paint trees too. . . . All the things I was trained to paint-- people and trees, landscapes and all that-- I can't paint. We're living in an urban culture that never existed even fifty years ago. (Chase and McBurnett, 1972, p. 79)

In an essay by John Canaday, which appears as an introduction to the book, Richard Estes: The Urban Landscape, Canaday refers to the manner in which Estes handles

relative tonalities (degrees of light and dark) and relative color intensities (degrees of brightness and dullness).

These relationships must be more accurately observed and reproduced, or more consistently modified, in super-realism than in any other form of painting if a detailed reproduction of the visual world is to hold together as a work of art. Estes's adjustments of these relationships, always subtle, is most impressively demonstrated in his control of illusionistic reflections in windows. . . . In later paintings Estes is increasingly preoccupied with the interplay of reality and reflection, until the intersections and overlapping of walls, floors, and sheets of glass in windows or doors, and the reflections of all of them intermingled, become remindful of the intersection transparent planes of analytical cubism's "fourth dimension." (Canaday, 1978, p. 10)

Because of the transparencies and reflections involved, Canaday comments that it is difficult to distinguish reality from reflections.

Reality and reflections of reality become all but indistinguishable from one another, until reality becomes a kind of fantasy in spite of rigidly explicit factual details. Looking into one of Estes's store windows we can hardly tell what is in front of us and what is reflected from behind us. We are at the center of an environment where our own reality becomes questionable. Undeniably we are present; our position is defined by the exactness of the perspective; we are standing at a point where normally our image would occur somewhere in the galaxy of reflections, but we are ignored as if atomized. (Canaday, 1978, p. 14)

In John Arthur's interview with Richard Estes, which is a part of the book, Richard Estes: The Urban

Landscape, Arthur refers to the various visual planes as layered space.

In paintings, such as the facades with reflections in the glass, the space is layered and it's difficult to get a fix on the space. The reflection in the glass doubles the space. We see not only inside the picture plane but also what occurs in front of the picture plane or facade. Because of that, they differ from the traditional receding planes. . . . Canaletto never had those plate glass windows to play with. (Arthur, 1978, p. 17)

Estes's response was: "In reality you don't get that either because the eye tends to focus either on the reflection or on the interior, but both can be painted with equal emphasis."

A photograph in the book shows Estes working in his studio at his easel using two wooden bars nailed vertically to the top and bottom edges of the canvas. A third wooden bar (a maulstick) was held horizontally across the two on which he rested his hand. He explained the purpose of these devices to his interviewer.

Well, with a T-square it serves the same purpose as a maulstick. When I'm working in oils I need something to rest my hand on because the paint is wet. I need a firm support for my hand about a quarter of an inch off the canvas. It's also like a T-square, so when I'm doing parallel lines they're all parallel. (Arthur, 1978, p. 38)

Arthur observed that Estes had primed his canvas with gesso and that the general outline of his basic drawing had been blocked in with diluted umber acrylic paint.

Some of the lights and darks had been blocked in, but at that point the painting was very broad. Estes explained the beginning stages of a painting.

I find it easier to get the overall effect first, the big areas, then work down into smaller areas. In that way I'm in control of the painting all of the time. I can't finish everything individually; it has to be finished all at the same time. . . . I try to take it as far as I can with the acrylics, but at a certain point it's easier to go into oil paint, which has a greater depth and range of colors, so its not that the colors and values are finalized; its a matter of relationships. . . . (Arthur, 1978, p. 39)

Estes further explained the reason he uses both oil and acrylic in his paintings.

The oil gives a greater depth and more control of the gradations of color, blending for example. It's a much richer look than acrylic. Acrylic is easier to work with; it's good for underpainting and dries quickly, so it's easy to make big corrections. With oil you have to know pretty much what should be there because of the differences in the characteristics and drying times of the colors. (Arthur, 1978, p. 42)

When discussing the medium which he uses with the oil, Estes said:

Recently, I've been using "Wingel." It's a medium that dries fairly quick and when I draw a line it won't bleed out. For instance, if I'm painting into a wet oil, and put a line in, the line will just start spreading and is very hard to control. So this medium allows me to get fairly sharp



detail with wet paint and it won't run.  
That seems to be the main advantage.  
(Arthur, 1978, p. 42)

"Wingel," is a synthetic resin-based medium. Use of this medium prevents running, spreading and yellowing. It accelerates drying time and retains gloss.

A student of Estes might wonder when Estes is totally finished with a painting, or might be curious as to how he decides when it is completed. Richard Estes's advice would be:

I would just get rid of a lot of the blotches, sharpen things up, adjust the values, get rid of flatness, so that there's a little more sparkle, a little more depth. I can see when it's going to stop. I can hear it too, when it goes click. (Arthur, 1978, p. 43)



Figure 20. JANET FISH  
"FOUR ASSORTED JARS"



Figure 21. JANET FISH  
"ORANGE BOWLS AND YELLOW PITCHER"



Figure 22. JANET FISH  
"BLUE FLAG AND HONEYSUCKLE"

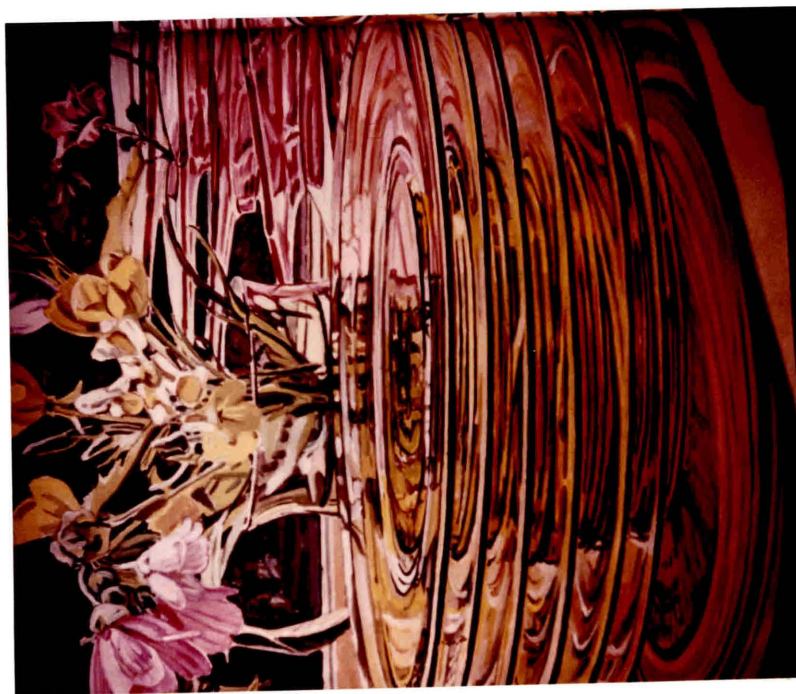


Figure 23. JANET FISH  
"YELLOW PLATES PINK PLATES"





Figure 24. RAPHAELLE PEALE  
"STILL LIFE"



Figure 25. LUIS MELENDEZ  
"BOX OF JELLIED FRUIT"

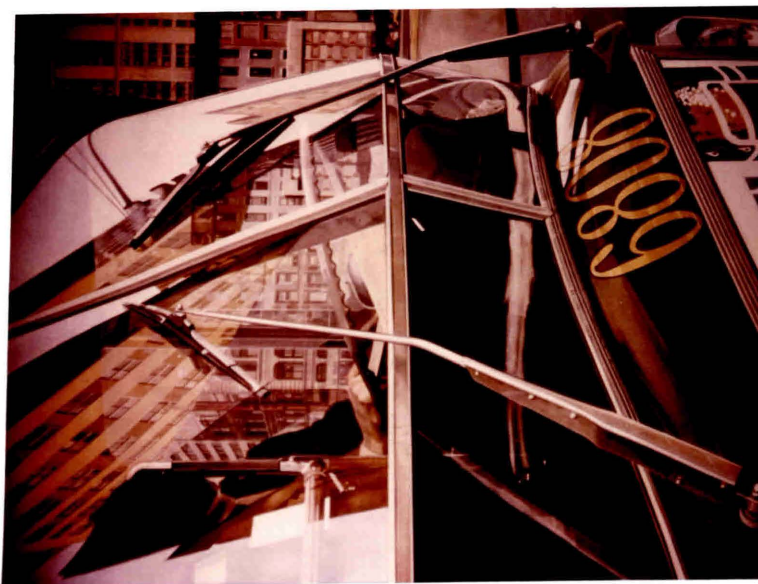


Figure 26. RICHARD ESTES  
"BUS WINDOW"



Figure 27. RICHARD ESTES  
"BUS REFLECTIONS"

## CHAPTER X.

### STATEMENT BY THE AUTHOR

In order to gain a practical perspective on the painting of transparent glassware, the writer completed a series of paintings including transparent glassware.

It was observed that bottles, jars and other glassware have three visually exciting qualities: varied shape, reflections, and transparent distortion. Each aspect provides a challenging problem for both perception and painting technique.

Many different shapes can be found in transparent glassware. Often, the apparently simple, balanced curves can be deceptively difficult to reproduce. Rudy deReyna explains how he arrives at a perfectly symmetrical shape:

I begin by drawing only the vase with an office pencil on tracing paper. First I draw the left side, then I mark the exact center, fold the paper on the vertical center line, and trace the back of the left side to get a symmetrical right edge. After taping the top edge of the drawing to the board, I slip a transfer paper under it and trace the vase with a 5H pencil. (deReyna, 1980, p. 135)

It was observed that the distortion of common objects viewed through transparent glassware results in curious patterns. Also, the reflective surface of the glassware often causes unusual distortions. These distortions are challenging to paint.

Although the eye is capable of observing only a single plane at one time, the artist is given the liberty in a single painting to represent various focal planes simultaneously. Richard Estes admits taking this artistic liberty. In an interview he said, "I want you to look at it all. Everything is in focus." (Chase and McBurnett, 1972, p. 79) At different points of focus, the artist may see various objects before him and behind him within the transparent glassware. This is a uniqueness of transparent glassware.

Another observation is that the ability to observe, depict and paint the images in the various focal planes depends upon the quantity and source of light. If the background source of light is weak or dark, there seems to be a greater emphasis upon the reflected plane. This is proved by observing that reflected images are more clearly recognizable when one is looking at a plate glass window behind which the lights are turned off or dimmed.

It was noticed that the representation of objects viewed through transparent glassware and reflected from transparent glassware changes in shape and size, depending upon the angle of perspective of the observer in relationship to the light source.

In the historical paintings studied, the apparent preoccupation was usually with objects seen through the

transparent glassware, or merely background color through transparent glassware. There was little emphasis on objects reflected in the glassware except the light source reflection usually depicted as white linear brush strokes on the perimeter of the transparent glassware. (Richard Estes and Janet Fish are notable exceptions as they are both definitely concerned with reflections as well as transparencies.)

The paintings executed by the writer in relationship to this paper address some of the various problems of depicting transparent glassware as revealed through this study.



## CHAPTER XI.

### SUMMARY

Charles Sterling poses this question in his book:

Are there any constant features in still life painting from antiquity to the present day? (Sterling, 1959, p. 124)

This writer has found that the depiction of transparent glassware has been a constant feature in still life painting from antiquity to the present day. Although many excellent reproductions of paintings were found which contain transparent glassware, there is little existent literature on the subject.

The writer is not certain why transparent glassware was so often included, and one can only surmise what importance, if any, should be attached to the depiction of transparent glassware in the paintings, but several observations have been made.

Madlyn Millner Kahr feels that the early "breakfast paintings" were intended to exert a moral exhortation to extol a temperate life. She notes that from 1640 onward a taste for luxury was evident in Dutch still lifes, and that the "banquet piece" replaced the "breakfast piece." (Kahr, 1978, pp. 197-198)

H. W. Janson mentions that luxury objects such as "crystal goblets and silver dishes" are emphasized in Dutch

paintings. (Janson, 1970, p. 430)

Held and Posner have similar comments regarding the Dutch:

Up to the middle of the century Hollanders are depicted as men of simple tastes and frugal habits. After 1650 we notice a trend toward luxury, possibly connected with the fact that more people were able to live on income from investments. . . . Still lifes painted before 1650 are apt to assemble objects made of glass, pewter and earthenware; the food is plain fare -- bread, cheese, smoked ham, herring and beer. Still lifes painted after 1650 are more likely to include objects made of silver, gold, crystal, and porcelain; the food might include lobsters, peaches, and wine. (Held and Posner, n. d., p. 229)

Symbolism attached to transparent glassware was seldom evident except for the Dutch School. Broken glassware or an overturned empty glass is thought to have been a symbol of the brevity of life on earth.

Some felt that the passglas in Rembrandt's self-portrait with Saskia was a symbol of extravagance and frivolity, while others maintained that he was warning against a wasted life as was the plight of the Biblical Prodigal Son.

Glassware has intrigued the imaginations of artists for the past 2,000 years--sometimes for profound philosophical reasons and other times for the joy and challenge of painting glass. The last four centuries

have yielded numerous masterpieces of great divergence,  
and many of them include transparent glassware.

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