

SALOMON LILIAN

DUTCH OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

Christoffel Pierson

The Hague 1631 – 1714 Gouda

A Pair of Still Lifes with Falconry Instruments

One of the two signed lower right (behind the net): Ch. Pierson

Oil on canvas

79 x 110 cm. / 79 x 109.6 cm.

Provenance:

Probably Florence, collection of Gian Gastone de' Medici (1671-1737), Grand Duke of Tuscany

France, private collection, until 2020

Literature:

Unpublished

According to the artist and art theorist Arnold Houbraken, Christoffel Pierson was of 'honourable descent'.¹ Pierson grew up in The Hague and his early education comprised the study of Latin, French, writing and drawing. He began his artistic career making portraits and history paintings, but soon turned to the depiction of hunting gear. He chose not to focus on the hunt itself, nor on the trophies, but on the actual implements involved in trapping and killing the game. This genre, the so-called *trompe l'oeil game pieces*, which consisted of accessories suspended before a monochrome wall, gained popularity in the city in the mid-seventeenth century. Those working in this genre often selected large canvases in order to represent the hunting equipment on a life-size scale.

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These extraordinary well-preserved pair of paintings, set against a white stucco wall, show elegantly arranged hunting paraphernalia. Through well-observed effects of light and shadow and meticulous attention to the smallest detail, the artist gives the painting a deceptively natural look. In the centre, an upturned flintlock-sporting gun rests upon two protruding nails, above a gamebag and other paraphernalia. The falconry hoods with red plumes are characteristic elements in these paintings and are recurring in other paintings by him as well. The artist placed different types of whistles, a powder bag, a powder horn, a shoulder bag, nets, a bow and arrows in two elaborate arrangements. Strong contrasts of light and shade enliven the images and strengthen the sense that bright daylight floods the scene.

This also applies to another painting by the artist, *Niche with Falconry Gear*, though upright and smaller, in the collection of The National Gallery of Art in Washington.² This work is datable to the 1660s. Pierson here decided to place the objects in an arched wooden-framed niche set into a white stucco wall, to further emphasize the three-dimensionality.

Proof of the previous owners of this unusual pair of paintings can be found at the reverse of the canvases. They belonged to the collection of Gian Gastone de' Medici (1671-1737), the last Grand Duke of Tuscany, descendant from the famous De' Medici family. With Gastone, the ruling Medici dynasty died out in the male line. One canvas is inscribed on the reverse in the centre 'Charl: Pierson' with the branded initials GG and the Grand Ducal Crown and old inventory numbers. The other is inscribed on the reverse in the centre 'Charles Pierson:' with the branded initials GG and the Grand Ducal Crown and old inventory numbers.

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¹ A. Tummers, in: S. Ebert-Schifferer, *Deceptions and Illusions : Five Centuries of Trompe l'Oeil Painting*, exh. cat. Washington, National Gallery of Art 2002-2003, p. 380, note 6, with reference to A. Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols., The Hague 1718-1721, II (1718), pp. 260-262.

² Oil on canvas, 80.5 x 64.5 cm., accession number 2003.39.1.