
cat. no. 2

Jacob Biltius

The Hague 1633 – 1681 Bergen op Zoom

A Trompe l'Oeil of Dead Fowl, a Hunting Net and a Whistle Suspended from four Nails

Oil on canvas

71.5 x 44 cm.

Provenance:

Switzerland, private collection

Literature:

Unpublished

The present, very well preserved painting by Biltius is a typical example by the artist and has emerged beautifully after cleaning.¹ The motif of hanging fowl and game appeared within the context of the aristocratic pastime of hunting. Specialists such as Biltius sought not only to render faithfully the colour and texture of the birds' plumage, but also to create the illusion of three-dimensionality and the suggestion of a real wall. Against a whitewashed wall, a huntsman's net, a whistle and two dead birds are suspended from nails. The shadows cast by the birds, leather

straps and nails, enhance the strong relief against the pale background. The image also reminds the spectator of the fleeting nature of life and, because the birds still possess the remnants of their appearance in life, its vulnerability. Biltius created a great many *trompe l'oeil* still-lives with dead game and hunting gear in the 1660s, especially after 1663. His composition can be associated with that of similar works by Jan Baptist Weenix (1621-c. 1660). In the 1670s the artist's attention returned to the traditional game piece, a table top display in an interior space.²





Fig.1 Jacob Biltius, *Dead Wildfowl and a Huntsman's Net*, oil on canvas, 67.5 x 50 cm., Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst

While a comparable painting by Biltius, *Dead Wildfowl and a Huntsman's Net*, in the Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, with suspended birds and attributes, extends the *trompe l'oeil* effect with a feigned wooden frame, throwing a fictive shadow, the lack of a painted frame in our work enhances the suggestion of a real wall (see fig. 1).

Jacob Biltius was born in The Hague and listed as a pupil of Carel Hardy (c. 1620-after 1656) in 1651. Biltius was active in in The Hague until 1660, a city which had become a thriving centre of the mature game piece and whose most important game painter was Cornelis Lelienbergh (1626-after 1676). From 1661 until 1666 Biltius lived in Amsterdam, before moving to Maastricht in 1666 where he lived until 1670. He then returned to Amsterdam before going to live in Antwerp from 1671 to 1678. The artist was known for his trophy pieces and *trompe l'oeil* paintings, and dated works are known from 1655 to 1680.

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Notes

- 1 According to A.J. van der Aa, *Biographisch woordenboek der Nederlanden*, 21 vols, Haarlem 1854-1878, 2 (1854), p. 557: 'Biltius, a Dutch painter, who flourished around the middle of the seventeenth century, painted dead game and other subjects, all still lifes and referring to the hunt, painted on a white wall, so naturally that one thought to see the objects themselves (*Biltius, een Hollandsch schilder, die omstreeks het midden der zeventiende eeuw bloeide, schilderde dood wild en andere onderwerpen, tot het stilleven behorende, en tot de jagt betrekking hebbende, al hetwelk hij op eenen witten grond zoo natuurluurlijk voorstelde, dat men die voorwerpen zelven meende te zien*)'.
- 2 S.A. Sullivan, *The Dutch Gamepiece*, Totowa (NJ) 1984, p. 50.



Detail of cat. no. 2