



**Two Women in an Interior with a
Basket of Lemons**

Caspar Netscher
(Prague or Heidelberg ca. 1639 – 1684 The
Hague)

ca. 1664–65
oil on panel
37.6 x 34.4 cm
CN-108

How To Cite

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Caspar Netscher's elegant depiction of a woman selecting lemons offers a twist on the familiar theme of a woman supervising her maid. The popularity of the subject in Dutch painting was linked to the exhortations of Jacob Cats and others regarding the housewife's pivotal role in the smooth running of the household.^[1] One of the primary responsibilities of a seventeenth-century Dutch housewife, according to Cats, was to ensure that her family was properly fed and provided for, whether she dispatched those duties herself or delegated them to a maidservant. Domestic manuals such as Cats's *Houwelyck* (Marriage) emphasized the importance of shopping wisely, obtaining the best quality food for the family without squandering the household purse. Images of women shopping for foodstuffs or interacting with vendors became increasingly popular from the 1640s onward in the hands of artists such as Quiringh van Brekelenkam (after 1622–ca. 1669), Jacob Ochtervelt (1634–82), Pieter de Hooch (1629–84), and others. Some depict the mistress of the house shopping in the marketplace or negotiating with vendors at the door to the family home (**fig 1**) (see also GM-114); others emphasize the housewife's pedagogical and managerial skills, showing her expertise by inspecting the goods selected by her maid (**fig 2**). Many of these interactions feature fish or soft fruits, perishable foodstuffs that tested a woman's skill in evaluating freshness and quality.

Most of these depictions are set in the *voorhuis* (front foyer) or courtyard of the home, or include a view to the outside, drawing attention to the role of commerce as a platform for interaction between the private realm and the outside world. By contrast, Netscher's *Two Women in an Interior with a Basket of Lemons* takes place within a cloistered room: although there is a doorway, it offers no visible route to—or interference from—the outside world. The exchange between the women seems designed not so much to show off the young woman's domestic competence as to draw attention to her graceful gestures and stylish garments. Moreover, while Brekelenkam's and Ochtervelt's housewives typically have set aside sewing, childcare, or some other worthy domestic chore in order to attend to the maid or vendor, Netscher's pretty protagonist shows no evidence of having been so industriously occupied. Indeed, the only objects on the table beside her are



Fig 1. Jacob Ochtervelt, *A Fishmonger at the Door*, 1663, oil on canvas, 55.5 x 44 cm, Mauritshuis, The Hague, inv. 195



Fig 2. Quiringh van Brekelenkam, *Interior with a Lady Choosing Fish*, 1664, oil on panel, 49.8 x 39.4 cm, Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester, inv. 1979.449, © Manchester City Galleries

a heavy silver candlestick, a mirror, a pearl necklace, and a crumpled cloth, while a decorative shelf hanging on the wall behind holds a gilded casket and two glass flasks: all objects that can be linked to the vanities of a woman's toilette.

In the seventeenth century, lemons and citrons were luxury items, imported to the Netherlands from the Mediterranean at considerable effort and expense. Their astringency was used to temper the sweetness of wine, or to balance the "moist humors" and "cold slime" of oysters. In paintings, lemons often functioned as symbols of temperance and moderation; or, prompted by the contrast between their external beauty and the tart flesh within, as warnings against sinful behavior.^[2] It is by no means certain that Netscher invested his painting with such associations. Nevertheless, by having the woman select lemons—rather than some more essential foodstuff, or one that might require particularly keen judgment—Netscher underscores her pampered situation. This is all the more apparent when *Two Women in an Interior with a Basket of Lemons* is juxtaposed with a slightly earlier and far humbler depiction of the same older woman as a fruit vendor (**fig 3**), this time selling cherries in an outdoor market to a young girl who receives the bright fruit in her bunched-up apron.^[3]

-Marjorie E. Wieseman



Fig 3. Caspar Netscher, *Cherrywoman with a Child*, oil on panel, 34.9 x 29.2 cm, National Trust, Tyntesfield, North Somerset, inv. no. 21099, photo credit: National Trust

Endnotes

1. Wayne E. Frantis, *Paragons of Virtue: Women and Domesticity in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Cambridge, 1993), 100; Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches* (New York, 1987), 422.
2. On the varied uses and interpretations of lemons, see Julie Berger Hochstrasser, "Feasting the Eye: Painting and Reality in the Seventeenth-Century 'Bancketje,'" in Alan Chong, Wouter Kloek, et al., *Still-Life Paintings from the Netherlands, 1550–1720* (Exh. cat. Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Zwolle, 1995), 75–76; Julie Berger Hochstrasser, *Still Life and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven and London, 2007), 70–74; and Regina Deckers, "Meisterwerke der Natur: Zitrusfrüchte im Stillleben," in *Die Frucht der Verheißung: Zitrusfrüchte in Kunst und Kultur*, ed. Yasmin Doosry, Christiane Lauterbach, and Johannes Pommeranz (Exh. cat. Nuremberg, Germanischen Nationalmuseum) (Nuremberg, 2011), 171–99, esp. 181–82. A contemporary source for the uses of citrus fruits is Johannes Commelijn, *Nederlantze hesperides, dat is, Oeffening en gebruik van de limoen- en oranje-boomen; gestelt na den aardt, en climaat der Nederlanden* (Amsterdam, 1676), esp. 46–47.



3. Netscher painted another depiction of the same older model offering a basket of fruit to a well-dressed woman, who holds out a coin: *The Fruit Seller*, ca. 1664, oil on panel, 30 x 34 cm, present location unknown; Marjorie E. Wieseman, *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Doornspijk, 2002), 186, no. 30.

Provenance

- Joseph-Hyacinthe-François de Paule de Rigaud, Comte de Vaudreuil (1740–1817), Paris (his sale, Paris, 24 November 1784, no. 68 [for 4,600 livres to Jacques Langlier for de Courmont 1]).
- François-Louis-Joseph de Laborde de Méréville (1761–1802), Paris and London. 2
- Edward Coxe (d. 1814), London (his sale, London, 23 April 1807, no. 72, as by Ter Borch [for £52.10]).
- Mr. Smith (possibly John Smith?)
- James-Alexandre de Pourtalès, Comte de Pourtalès-Gorgier (1776–1855), London (his sale, London, 20 May 1826, no. 99 [for £142.16 to James Dunford]). 3
- Charles Cope, London, by 1842 (his sale, Christie's, London, 8 June 1872, no. 53 [for £372.15, to Agnew's Gallery, London; to Heugh]).
- John Heugh, London, by 1872 (his sale, London, 11 May 1878, no. 253 [for £210, to Agnew's Gallery, London, for Hodgson]).
- R. K. Hodgson, Esq., London, 1878 [Agnew's Gallery, London; for £650 to Guinness, 1891].
- Edward Cecil Guinness, 1st Earl of Iveagh (1847–1927), London, 1891; by inheritance to Honorable Arthur Ernest Guinness (1876–1949), by 1927; by descent to Mrs. Ernest Guinness (Marie Clotilde Russell, d. 1953), Holmsbury House, Holmsbury St. Mary, Sussex, by 1952 (sale, Christie's, London, 10 July 1953, no. 65 [for £1,650 to Slatter; Dr. Arthur Kauffmann, London/Dr. Fritz Nathan, Zurich, to Bührle, 1954]).
- Collection Emil Bührle (1890–1956), Zurich; by descent to Dr. Dieter Bührle (1921–2012), Zurich (from about 1956); sold by him to Römer Fine Art, Zurich, 2007.
- Galerie Nissl, Eschen, Liechtenstein, 2007].
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2007.



Exhibition History

- London, Royal Academy of Arts, "Exhibition of the Works of the Old Masters, Together with Works of Deceased Masters of the British School," 1872, no. 190 [lent by Mrs. Charles Cope].
- London, Royal Academy of Arts, "Dutch Pictures 1450–1750," Winter 1952–53, no. 436 [lent by Mrs. Ernest Guinness].
- Zurich, Schloss Jegenstorf, "Alte Meister aus der Sammlung E. Bührle, Zurich," 21 May–31 August 1955, no. 12 [lent by E. Bührle].
- Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, on loan with the permanent collection, January 2011–January 2015 [lent by the present owner].

References

- Smith, John. *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish and French Painters*. 9 vols. London, 1829–42, 4:152, no. 23; 9: 42, no. 19.
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- *Exhibition of the Works of the Old Masters, Together with Works of Deceased Masters of the British School*. Exh. cat. London, Royal Academy. London, 1872, 20, no. 190.
- Hofstede de Groot, Cornelis. *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century Based on the Work of John Smith*. 8 vols. London, 1907–27, 5:178, no. 87. Translated from *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*. 10 vols. Esslingen and Paris, 1907–28.
- Graves, Algernon. *Art Sales from Early in the Eighteenth Century to the Early Twentieth Century*. 3 vols. London, 1918–21, 2:282.
- Holmes, Charles. *Pictures from the Iveagh Bequest and Collections*. London, 1928, xv; no.



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- *Dutch Pictures 1450–1750*. Exh. cat. London, Royal Academy of Arts. London, 1952–53, 83, no. 436.
- *Alte Meister aus der Sammlung E. Bührle, Zurich*. Exh. cat. Zurich, Schloss Jegenstorf. Zurich, 1955, 7, no. 12.
- Wieseman, Marjorie E. *Caspar Netscher and Late Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting*. Doornspijk, 2002, 185–86, no. 29.
- Bryant, Julius. *Kenwood: Paintings in the Iveagh Bequest*. New Haven and London, 2005, 419.

Versions

Versions and Copies

1. After Caspar Netscher, *Two Women in an Interior with a Basket of Lemons*, support and dimensions unknown, whereabouts unknown.

Technical Summary

The support, a single plank of vertically grained, rectangular oak, has bevels on all four sides. A vertical split has been reinforced with three wood cleats and a mahogany strip.^[1] The panel is unthinned and uncradled and has no machine tool marks. There are two paper labels but no wax collection seals, import stamps or panel maker's marks along the panel reverse.

A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied followed by paint thinly and smoothly applied with no use of impasto. No underdrawing is readily apparent in infrared images and no compositional changes are noted in the X-radiograph. There is a large area of reserve surrounding the younger woman's head.

The painting is unsigned and undated.

The painting underwent minor panel work and restoration along the vertical split in 2006.

It is in fair condition with areas of abrasion along the elderly woman's drapery, the wicker basket and the floor, and is in a good state of preservation.^[2]



-Annette Rupprecht