

Jan Fyt, *Still Life with Fruit, Birds, and a Wanli Kraak Porcelain Bowl*

oil on canvas
25 ¼ by 35 ¼ inches (64.2 by 89.6 cm.)
signed: 'Joannes.Fyt'

provenance: Collection of A. Langen ;
his sale, Riegner & Helbing, Munich, June 5, 1899, lot 35 ;
Private collection, Lille, France

literature: F.G. Meijer, *Stillevens uit de Gouden Eeuw*, Boymans-van Beuningen Museum,
Rotterdam 1989, p. 126

note: The son of an affluent merchant, Jan Fyt was born in Antwerp in 1611. He was the pupil of Hans van den Berch in 1620-21 and later, of Frans Snyders, who influenced his choice of subject, mostly game and animal still lifes, and his early style, characterized by vigorous brushwork. Fyt remained with Snyders for a year after becoming a master of the guild in 1629-30. He was recorded in Paris in 1633 and 1634, and was active in Venice and possibly Rome before returning to Antwerp by 1641. Following his return, he became one of the principal figures of the Flemish Baroque School of still life painting. Fyt married there in 1654, and pursued a most industrious and successful career until his death on September 11, 1661.

Fyt specialized in game still lifes; his subtle style evolved in a more painterly and restrained manner than that of Snyders. This, and his emphasis on the distinct values of texture and light, reveals the influence of Dutch painters, especially Jan Davidsz. de Heem. During his career, Fyt collaborated with Erasmus Quellinus, Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert, and other figure painters, and was also an engraver. The best of his numerous pupils was Pieter Boel. Late in his career, Fyt began to enrich his oeuvre with a few boldly painted flower pieces. Although he had incorporated flowers into his pictures since the 1640s, his primary focus had been on game still lifes and animal paintings, in which fur and feathers are painted with obvious relish. In addition, bouquets of flowers and baskets of fruit sometimes appear as subsidiary elements in expansive natural settings. The artist seems to have preferred heavy, pendulous blooms, rather than carefully arranged bouquets. In addition, his late paintings frequently contain large, coarsely decorated architectural fragments, and are often placed in front of a dilapidated wall.

The current work is an excellent example of Fyt's still life oeuvre. As with many of his larger still lives the notion of texture is important. Here the combination of crisp white cloth, the feathers of the birds, the hard wicker basket, the fruit and leaves and the hard but smooth Wanli bowl show us all manner of texture possibilities. Fyt was a master of rendering these details, particularly in the soft downy feathers of the birds as well as the color contrasts of the different elements of the still life. He often used Chinese porcelain painted in vivid blues to set off the other elements of the still life.

Mostly known for game still lives his masterly fruit compositions are no less accomplished and display his unique stylistic talents. The influence of his Flemish upbringing and particularly of Frans Snijders are all too clear in this still life, which convey a sense of drama through the elaborate arrangement of fruit and rich coloring. Similar compositions exist of this type, notably the example in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (inv.nr. 705). A copy of this painting was on the market in France and is now in Lille.