

KLAAS MULLER

P I E T E R C L A E S Z .

Still Life with a Silver Tazza

This beautifully preserved work by Pieter Claesz. can be dated to around 1636-37; a similar signed work with exactly the same dimensions, Tazza and also a watch, is in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (Obj. No. SK-C-1694).

In this still life by Pieter Claesz, we see a carefully arranged composition featuring a tazza, a timepiece, a book, an oil lamp, and several shells. The subdued color palette and soft, controlled light highlight the remarkable variety of textures—metal, glass, paper, and organic surfaces—rendered with extraordinary precision. The sheen of the metal tazza, the fragile pages of the book, and the translucent glow of the oil lamp all demonstrate Claesz's incredible ability to depict materials convincingly.

Beyond their visual beauty, the objects carry symbolic meaning. The timepiece and the oil lamp refer to the passage of time, while the book and shells suggest knowledge, transience, and the fragility of human existence. Characteristic of Claesz's work, the scene radiates quiet restraint, yet the masterful handling of light, reflection, and shadow invites contemplation of the fleeting nature of life and reveals the artist's exceptional craftsmanship.

Pieter Claesz (c. 1597–1660) was one of the most important still-life painters of the Dutch Golden Age. Although little is known about his early life, he was likely born in Berchem, near Antwerp, and moved to Haarlem at a young age. Haarlem became the center of his artistic career, and he joined the Guild of Saint Luke there in 1621, which allowed him to work as an independent master.

Throughout the 1620s and 1630s, Claesz developed a highly distinctive style, focusing on ontbijtjes (breakfast pieces) and vanitas still lifes. His paintings are characterized by a restrained color palette, carefully balanced compositions, and an exceptional sensitivity to light and atmosphere. Rather than emphasizing abundance, Claesz favored simplicity and harmony, using everyday objects to convey deeper moral and philosophical meanings about time, knowledge, and mortality.

Claesz enjoyed considerable success during his lifetime and influenced many artists, including his son, Nicolaes Pietersz. Berchem, who became a well-known landscape painter. By the end of his career, Claesz was widely respected for his technical mastery and subtle realism. His work remains highly valued today for its quiet elegance and profound sense of contemplation.

We are grateful to Martina Brunner-Bulst and Fred Meijer for having confirmed the painting as a Pieter Claesz

Oil on panel, 40.5 x 56 cm (16 x 22 inches).

