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COMD 1112
Prof Bauer
Art History-Museum Paper
Course Number and Section

Still Life with Ham
Artist: Philippe Rousseau (French, Paris 1816-1887)
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Date: 1870s
Dimensions: 28 (3/4) x 36 (1/4) in
Credit Line: Catherine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, 1982
Accession Number: 1982.320



Still Life with Oysters, a Silver Tazza, and Glassware
Artist: Willem Claesz Heda (Dutch, Haarlem 1594-1680)
Medium: Oil on wood
Date: 1635
Dimensions: 19 (5/8) x 31 (3/4) in
Credit Line: From the Collection of Rita and Frits Markus, Bequest of Rita Markus. 2005
Accession Number: 2005.331.4



Lunch Is Served

The two paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Still Life with Ham* (ca.1870s) by Philippe Rousseau and *Still life with Oysters, a Silver Tazza, and Glassware* (ca.1635) by Willem Claesz Heda, conveys a variety of messages about human vanity and hardship. Also both paintings bring focus on the experiences and sights of everyday contemporary life. The painting called *Still Life with Ham* shows the pleasures of consuming imported luxuries while *Still Life with oysters, a Silver Tazza, and Glassware* shows one's own dignity and struggles in life. Both paintings show emphasis on everyday details, such as the dining table, utensils, plates, glassware, food, and alcohol. The two paintings are positioned horizontal with two dimensional representation close to the front of the canvas/wood. The visual imagery of both paintings are so moving because we see things that we know and love.

The painting of *Still Life with Ham* depicts a formal Luncheon for somebody with high qualities and achievements. In the background is a decorated mural of landscape on the wall. The painting suggests that the person dining comes from the highest class in society with royalty status in the community. The table is set meticulously with high standards. The wrinkles/creases are proof that the tablecloth is brand new. The silverware is placed close to the edge of the table. The fork is on the left, and knife on the right for a fancy meal. The painting shows signs for an elegant occasion. To the left

of the silverware is a plate. On top of the plate lies a neatly rolled napkin through a ring and an envelope placed over it facing the viewer. An unread newspaper with a wide band wrapped around is hanging left of the corner on the table, which suggests this guest is on his way to dine.

The spread of food and drinks on the dining table looks delightful and evokes wealth to whomever is dining. The succulent ham is the star of the show. The ham is positioned in the middle of the painting. The picture gives great aesthetic pleasure. The succulent ham is garnished with a sprig of bay leaves. A long, sharp carving knife rests on the side of ham suggesting the chef is waiting to prepare and serve food to the guest. To the far right corner of the ham is a small bowl of condiments divided in half. One half is Mayonnaise and the other half is mustard. Above the condiment stands a bottle of Oil & Vinaigrette. On the far left of the painting shows half the image of a loaf of bread cut in half. The painting shows off all the ingredients for this pure, simple ham sandwich. The perfect pairing with a ham sandwich is a glass of wine. In this painting, it is a steel cup. Both fit the theme of simple elegance. A big bottle of wine sits uncorked and ready to drink. A fancy glass pitcher to the left is used for storing and pouring the wine. The painter used bright color tones for this work of art to create a sense of two dimensions against the dark green background. The colors are high in contrast to create a realistic image of still life.

In contrast to Still life with Ham, Still Life with Oysters, a Silver Tazza, and Glassware has neutral and dark color tones. The use of monochromatic colors help show lots of

surface details. This concept is used in Dutch art during the Baroque period. The dark brown background gets lighter in the middle, as if sunlight is shining down the dining table. This shows viewers that this feast started during the day. A page from the newspaper is twisted into a cone to hold spice and half-peeled lemon is on the plate with its skin intact. The half-shelled oysters are partially consumed and a Silver Tazza holding walnuts gets toppled. The cover for a sword is left hanging off the table under the Silver Tazza. The spoon and knife lie in disarray. A broken glass cup is overturned and focused in the middle of this painting. This give the impression that people have just stepped away from the table. The dark and sharp colors used in this painting creates a strong sense of movement and life.

The tension between the appetizing food on the table and the sense of disarray makes the viewer looking at the painting curious about the mysterious scene. The scene feels disturbing and uncomfortable. The painting makes us wonder about the hidden story and why they left so suddenly?

Despite the similarity of these two paintings with food and drinks on the table, they both capture different personalities that are represented by the experiences and sights of everyday contemporary life.