



Woman Selling Game from a Stall

Gabriel Metsu
(Leiden 1629 – 1667 Amsterdam)

ca. 1653–54
oil on canvas
161.3 x 130 cm
signed in dark paint on side of wooden barrel,
lower right: “Gmetf u” (“Gm” in ligature)
GM-114

How to cite

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The interactions of food sellers and their clients was a theme that greatly appealed to Gabriel Metsu. He painted no fewer than fifteen market scenes over the course of his short career, making it the most popular theme in his oeuvre. Despite the prevalence of this subject matter in the works of Gerrit Dou (1613–75) and Frans van Mieris (1635–81), Metsu painted only one market scene during his Leiden period, *Woman Selling Game from a Stall*.^[1] Although he executed this work in the vicinity of Dou's and Van Mieris's studios, this painting differs strongly from those two artists' works, as well as from Metsu's own later market scenes, in terms of its large scale, broad painting technique, figure types and the emphasis on foreground still life elements.

Woman Selling Game from a Stall represents a robust female vendor of game and poultry who holds up a large hare by one of its paws for the approval of a young female customer. The coin the young woman holds in her hand indicates that the vendor has been successful in her marketing efforts. The foreground is filled with various dead birds, including a goose, a rooster and a duck. A pigeon, having escaped from its tipped-over wicker cage, is distracted by a black-and-white dog sniffing a

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Gabriel Metsu, *The Dismissal of Hagar*, 1653–54, oil on canvas, 112 x 86 cm, Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden, S 2209, purchased with support of Vereniging Rembrandt

dead rooster in the left foreground. A few other vending stalls are visible in the left background.

This ambitious youthful work measures 159.1 x 124.9 cm, making it one of the largest pictures of Metsu's entire oeuvre.^[2] Its enormous size suggests that he painted it on commission rather than for the free market. It seems exceptional that someone would have ordered this work from the young artist, who had no previous experience in painting large still lifes. In fact, *Woman Selling Game from a Stall* is the first of Metsu's paintings to feature any animal other than a dog.^[3]

The piece is foremost a response to the work of the Utrecht artist Jan Baptist Weenix (1621–60/61). Metsu came into contact with Weenix through Nicolaus Knüpfer (ca. 1603–55), with whom he probably apprenticed in the early 1650s.^[4] Weenix, who is known to have collaborated with Knüpfer, was a specialist in both Italianate landscapes and animal still lifes.^[5] The clearest confirmation of Metsu's admiration for Weenix's paintings is his early *The Dismissal of Hagar*, ca. 1653–54 (**fig 1**). The stocky, muscular figures and Mediterranean setting in that painting call to mind the shepherdesses in Weenix's Italianate landscapes.^[6] Moreover, the fluid painting technique, the manner of underpainting the composition, and the choice of pigments are also similar to that Utrecht master's style.^[7]

Stylistically, *Woman Selling Game from a Stall* relates to Weenix's *The Dismissal of Hagar*. Metsu executed both paintings with elongated brushwork and they share an overall greenish-brown palette with a few concentrated accents of white and red. Furthermore, in both works the figures stand before an open door of a diagonally receding building covered by an arched wooden awning. Each painting also includes a tilted tree in front of the house and a view into the distance.

Although Weenix never seems to have painted a market scene with game and poultry that could have served as Metsu's source of inspiration, he did paint a number of large still lifes. Some of these feature dead hares hanging upside down, as well as ducks, geese and swans lying on their backs with their heads drooping down (**fig 2**).^[8] It is also likely that Metsu knew of the market scenes painted by such Flemish artists as Pieter Aertsen (1507/8–75), Joachim Beuckelaer (ca. 1534–ca. 1574), and Frans Snyders (1579–1657), which show similar vending stalls with rich displays of various kinds of game and poultry.^[9]

Composing this market scene proved challenging to the young artist. The interaction between the figures is awkward, as the vendor has turned toward the viewer while addressing the customer behind her. The positioning of the animals, the tables and the cage looks disjointed, even chaotic. Metsu may have exaggerated perspective effects to accommodate a client's wish to hang the painting in an elevated position, but his efforts were not entirely successful.



Fig 2. Jan Baptist Weenix, *Game Still Life with Hunter*, 1652, oil on canvas, 138 x 195 cm, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, bpk, Berlin / Alte Pinakothek / Art Resource, NY

Although the muscular physiognomy of Metsu's vendor is reminiscent of women Weenix depicted in his paintings of the Italian *campagna*, her facial features and those of her customer resemble those in paintings by Maerten Stoop (ca. 1620–47).^[10] Stoop was a Utrecht painter whose oeuvre shows a strong affinity with the work of Knüpfer and Weenix. Although Stoop had died by the time Metsu arrived in Utrecht, his impact is evident in some of the younger artist's early Leiden paintings.^[11]

The women's attire here is not typical of contemporary Dutch fashion. A revealing top that amplifies a woman's chest to such an extent would hardly have been worn by female vendors in the markets of Leiden or Utrecht. Since the mid-sixteenth century, with paintings by Aertsen and Beuckelaer, artists had generally depicted market women as seductresses, with the foods they sell underscoring their sexuality.^[12] The slashed sleeves of the woman's red top may have had a similar function. They are not in accordance with contemporary fashion, but they do appear in fantasy costumes worn by Metsu's depictions of prostitutes and jesters.^[13]

The female customer's hooded cloak is typical of fashions from the southern Netherlands, which may suggest that Metsu painted this work for a Flemish immigrant in Leiden.^[14] As both of the artist's parents had originally come from the southern Netherlands, the local community of refugees was among the artist's clientele.^[15] Metsu's most important commission prior to *A Woman Selling Game from a Stall* was *The Triumph of Justice*, which came from Michiel van Peenen, a merchant whose father was from Belle, the present-day Bailleul, near Lille, the same village in which Metsu's father was born.^[16] Their shared origins must have been the determining factor for Van Peenen to approach Metsu, for the artist was not experienced in painting such complicated allegories.^[17] Likewise, *Woman Selling Game from a Stall* may have been commissioned from a client with shared Flemish roots.

Although the early provenance of *Woman Selling Game from a Stall* is unknown, the painting probably stayed in Leiden for an extended period of time. The eighteenth-century Leiden painter Louis de Moni (1698–1771), who was a great admirer of Metsu's work, painted a copy after it.^[18] Although the work is a faithful repetition, it is far smaller in size (58.5 x 49 cm) than Metsu's impressive youthful painting.

Endnotes

1. Adriaan E. Waiboer, *Gabriel Metsu, Life and Work: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, 2012), 50–55, 100–4. For more on Metsu's *Vegetable Market in Amsterdam*, see *ibid.*, 100–2, 236–37, no. A-94, ill.
2. The largest painting is *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, which measures 134 x 165 cm.
3. Dead and live birds would appear regularly in Metsu's genre scenes from later in his career, but usually not more than one or two at a time. The artist's predilection for representing birds culminated in 1655–58, when he painted a dead white cockerel hanging on a string, a rare independent still life that allowed him to show off his proficiency in painting feathers. See Adriaan E. Waiboer, *Gabriel Metsu, Life and Work: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, 2012), 64–66.
4. On Metsu's relationship with Knüpfer, see Adriaan E. Waiboer, *Gabriel Metsu, Life and Work: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, 2012), 12–19.
5. On the collaboration between Knüpfer and Weenix, see Carl Willnau, "Die Zusammenarbeit des Nikolaus Knüpfer mit anderen Künstlern," *Oud Holland* 67 (1952): 210–17; and Jo Saxton, *Nicolaus Knüpfer (1603/09–1655): An Original Artist* (Doornspijk, 2005), 41, 43.
6. On Metsu's relationship with Weenix, see Adriaan E. Waiboer, *Gabriel Metsu, Life and Work: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, 2012), 23–24.
7. Melanie E. Gifford, "Fine Painting and Eloquent Imprecision: Gabriel Metsu's Painting Technique," in *Gabriel Metsu*, ed. Adriaan E. Waiboer (Exh. cat. Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2010), 159–61.
8. Weenix did paint *Market Sellers before Architectural Capricci*, undated, oil on canvas, 56 x 44.5 cm, last recorded Bernheimer Old Masters, Munich, 1999, photograph at the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague, but this painting focuses on the Italianate setting instead of on a rich display of poultry and game.
9. Sturla J. Gudlaugsson, "Kanttekeningen bij de ontwikkeling van Metsu," *Oud Holland* 83 (1968): 16, already suggested that Metsu may have drawn inspiration from Flemish market scenes.
10. See, for example, Maerten Stoop's *Lady at Her Dressing Table*, mid-1640s, oil on panel, 61.5 x 51.5 cm, present location unknown, last recorded Kunsthandel Cramer, The Hague, 1977, photograph at the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague.
11. Adriaan E. Waiboer, *Gabriel Metsu, Life and Work: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, 2012), 24–25.
12. Keith Moxey, "Pieter Aertsen, Joachim Beuckelaer, and the Rise of Secular Painting in the Context of the Reformation" (PhD diss. University of Chicago, 1977), 26–53, 98–102. See also GM-100.
13. See, for instance, Adriaan E. Waiboer, *Gabriel Metsu, Life and Work: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, 2012), 165–66, nos. A-2, A-3; 236–38, no. A-94, all ill.

14. Sturla J. Gudlaugsson, “Kanttekeningen bij de ontwikkeling van Metsu,” *Oud Holland* 83 (1968): 16 n. 11.
15. On the Flemish origins of Metsu’s parents, see Adriaan E. Waiboer, *Gabriel Metsu, Life and Work: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, 2012), 3–4.
16. Linda Stone-Ferrier, “Metsu’s *Justice Protecting Widows and Orphans*: Patron and Painter Relationships and Their Involvement in the Social and Economic Plight of Widows and Orphans in Leiden,” in *The Public and Private in Dutch Culture of the Golden Age*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. and Adele Seeff (Newark, Del., 2000), *passim*; Pieter Roelofs, “Early Owners of Paintings by Metsu in Leiden and Amsterdam,” in *Gabriel Metsu*, ed. Adriaan E. Waiboer (Exh. cat. Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum; Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 2010), 101–2.
17. Adriaan E. Waiboer, *Gabriel Metsu, Life and Work: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, 2012), 17.
18. Louis de Moni’s copy appeared for sale at Sotheby’s, London, 3–4 December 1997, no. 189, ill., as after G. Metsu. Moni painted several copies after works by Metsu and even seems to have owned works by him (Adriaan E. Waiboer, *Gabriel Metsu, Life and Work: A Catalogue Raisonné* [New Haven, 2012], 181, copy 2 after no. A-29; 210, copy 5 after no. A-66 [possibly by De Moni]; 277, copy 4 after no. B-7; 284, copy 2 after no. B-16; 290, no. C-14; 290–91, no. C-26; 295, no. C-78).

Provenance

- [Art dealer Lesser, London, 1887].
- Sir Thomas-Fermor Hesketh, 8th Baronet, later 1st Baron Hesketh (1881–1944), Easton Neston, Northamptonshire; thence by direct family descent (sale, Sotheby’s, London, 8 July 2009, no. 9; [Johnny van Haften, London]).
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2009.

Exhibition History

- Bath, Holburne Museum of Art, “A Matter of Life and Death,” 23 January–25 March 2007 [no number, lent by Lord and Lady Hesketh].
- Bath, Holburne Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, April 2007–March 2008 [lent by Lord and Lady Hesketh].
- Northampton, Northampton Museum and Art Gallery, January–May 2009, on loan with the permanent collection [lent by Lord and Lady Hesketh].

- Ithaca, Cornell University, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, “An Eye for Detail: Dutch Painting from the Leiden Collection,” 20 September 2014–21 June 2015 [lent by the present owner].
- Beijing, National Museum of China, “Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 17 June–3 September 2017 [lent by the present owner].
- Shanghai, Long Museum, West Bund, “Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hals in the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 23 September 2017–25 February 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, “The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection,” 28 March 2018–22 July 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, “The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection,” 5 September 2018–13 January 2019 [lent by the present owner].
- Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, “Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age. Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre,” 14 February–18 May 2019 [lent by the present owner].

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3. Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal. Zwolle, 1988.

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Versions

Versions and Copies

1. Louis de Moni (1698–1771), *A Woman Selling Game from a Stall*, oil on panel, 58.5 x 49 cm, whereabouts unknown (sale, Sotheby's, London, 3–4 December, 1997, no. 189).

Technical Summary

The support is composed of two pieces of medium-weight, plain-weave fabric joined with a vertical seam, which transverses the basket and tree. The upper corners and all four tacking margins have been removed. Fabric inserts along the upper corners complete the rectangular format in which the painting has been lined.^[1] Pronounced cusping along the upper and lower edges and slight cusping along the left and right edges suggest the original dimensions have not been significantly altered. There are paper labels and white chalk but no wax collection seals, stencils or import stamps along the lining or stretcher.



A light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied. The paint has been applied with broad transparent brushstrokes through the sky and brown foreground, which allows the light-colored underlayer to show through, and smoothly in opaque layers of rich paste blended wet-into-wet through the figures. The feathers of the goose have been painted with dry brushwork and low impasto, and the gold strands of the wheat stalks lying in the foreground have been applied wet-over-dry.

No underdrawing or compositional changes are readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers.

The painting is signed in dark paint on the side of the wooden barrel along the lower right, but is undated.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition in 2009 aside from minor consolidation along the vertical seam in 2012. The painting remains in a good state of preservation.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. The straight radiuses of the triangular-shaped inserts are 9–11 cm in length. The third edge of each insert is rounded like a circle wedge.