



Woman with Carrots and Haddock

Gabriel Metsu
(Leiden 1629 – 1667 Amsterdam)

1657

oil on panel

27.6 x 24.8 cm

signed in dark brown paint, lower right: “G
Metsu”

GM-107



How to cite

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In *Woman with Carrots and Haddock*, Gabriel Metsu (1629–67) depicts a young woman seated at a table, peeling a carrot. Two more carrots lie on the table, with others in a nearby bucket. Prominently positioned in the foreground is an earthenware plate, tilted slightly to display a pile of fish with glistening scales and exposed guts. With her direct gaze, the woman draws the viewer into a scene of everyday life, with everyday food.

Woman with Carrots and Haddock is one of four paintings from the mid-1650s in which Metsu depicted a young woman handling fish or vegetables in front of a brick building.^[1] The fish depicted in this painting are haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*), a marine fish from the cod family (*Gadidae*).^[2] Another work from this group in The Leiden Collection, *Woman Cleaning Fish*, also features haddock (next to plaice, a type of flatfish) (**fig 1**).^[3] In that painting, a prominent set of market scales hanging on the wall at right suggests that the figure may be a street vendor.^[4] Though no commercial exchange is shown, her direct gaze places the viewer in the role of the customer.^[5] There are no market scales in *Woman with Carrots and Haddock*, yet the painting's similarities to *Woman Cleaning Fish*—including its subject's position out of doors while looking directly at the viewer, along with the earthenware plate of haddock tipped invitingly forward—suggest that here too Metsu depicts a food vendor.

Metsu's scenes of market life have precedents in the sixteenth-century paintings of food stalls by Pieter Aertsen (ca. 1508–75) and his nephew Joachim Beuckelaer (1534–ca. 1574). Their works have been understood as references to sexuality and fertility.^[6] Consequently, depictions of market exchanges and maidservants by Metsu and other seventeenth-century Dutch painters have been interpreted both as straightforward images of daily commerce and as paintings laden with sexual symbolism.^[7] In Dutch genre painting, the motif of a maid selling or handling fish often had erotic connotations.^[8] Yet, in *Woman with Carrots and Haddock*, the subject's modest attire and demure expression make such a reading unlikely.^[9]

Metsu lived on a dead-end alley off the Prinsengracht in Amsterdam, just steps from the city's vegetable market.^[10] As he walked through his neighborhood, he would have passed the large market and encountered many street vendors selling fish, poultry, vegetables, fruits, and pancakes, the very foods that he depicted so compellingly in his paintings.^[11] The neighborhood was an important social unit in early modern Dutch cities, in which social norms dictated honorable and convivial behavior. While street vending was a common aspect of neighborhood life, it needed to be conducted appropriately, or residents would complain. The seventeenth-century owners of Metsu's paintings of orderly street markets and prudent food vendors likely viewed

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Gabriel Metsu, *Woman Cleaning Fish*, ca. 1657–58, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 27.3 cm, The Leiden Collection, inv. no. GM-100.



Fig 2. Gabriel Metsu, *The Vegetable Market in Amsterdam*, ca. 1660–61, oil on canvas, 97 x 84 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. 1460. © 2016 GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Franck Raux



Fig 3. Gerrit Dou, *Herring Seller and Boy*, ca. 1664, oil on panel, 43.5 x 34.5 cm, The Leiden Collection, inv. no. GD-106.

them as embodiments of “the social control and moral code inherent in neighborhood networks.”^[12]

Sixteenth-century scenes of market stalls like Aertsen’s and Beuckelaer’s often overflow with poultry, fish, vegetables, and fruit, each rendered with such precision that individual species can be clearly identified. While some seventeenth-century Dutch market scenes still display a variety of foods—for instance the vegetables and poultry in Metsu’s *The Vegetable Market in Amsterdam* (fig 2) or the range of fish species in Emmanuel de Witte’s *The Nieuwe Vismarkt (New Fish Market) in Amsterdam*, 1655–92 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)—Dutch genre painting in this period shifted toward more subdued depictions of food handlers, featuring fewer items and little variety. *Woman with Carrots and Haddock*, for example, features only two types of food. Leiden *fijnschilders* (fine painters) in particular seem to have produced such modest scenes, for instance Gerrit Dou’s *Herring Seller and Boy* (fig 3). Likewise, women preparing simple foods also appear in domestic scenes such as Frans van Mieris’s *Elderly Couple in an Interior* (fig 4), in The Leiden Collection.

The fish and root vegetables in *Woman with Carrots and Haddock* were staples of the Dutch diet, sold at large markets and by small-scale street vendors alike.^[13] Haddock and plaice were both commercially exploited species and readily available. The sixteenth-century fisherman and naturalist Adriaen Coenen (1514–87) noted that haddock was caught in abundance along the North Sea coast of the Low Countries, an assertion confirmed by later seventeenth-century sources.^[14] The exposed fish guts in Metsu’s *Woman with Carrots and Haddock* and *Woman Cleaning Fish* likely represent the livers, which were considered a delicacy.^[15]

The accurate rendering of plant and animal species reflected a broad interest in the natural world’s diversity. For instance, collectors in the seventeenth century prized print series with anatomically correct images of flora and fauna. Perhaps the first of such series specifically devoted to aquatic animals was Nicolaes de Bruyn’s *Libellus varia genera piscium complectens*, published in Antwerp around 1594.^[16] Plate 6 (out of 13) shows a haddock, listed under the then-common name *Asellus minor* (fig 5).^[17] De Bruyn’s print series was re-published throughout the seventeenth century, for example by De Bruyn’s son-in-law. Other visual material, as well as descriptions of paintings in inventories, confirm that haddock was frequently depicted in the Low Countries.^[18] Dutch painters were also invested in rendering the surface textures of fish.^[19] Capturing the sheen of fish scales, for example, allowed painters to showcase their capacity for mimetic representation. This attention to texture was probably a key factor in the appeal of the many Dutch *Stillevens met vis* (fish paintings), which ranged from genre pieces and market scenes to still lifes.

This fascination with materiality, or outward appearance and surface texture, also



Fig 4. Frans van Mieris, *Elderly Couple in an Interior*, ca. 1650–55, oil on panel, 52 x 39.6 cm, The Leiden Collection, inv. no. FM-100.

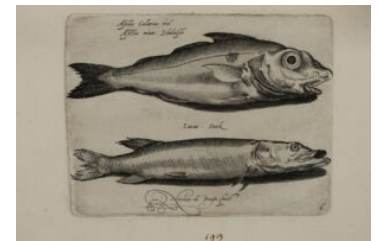


Fig 5. Nicolaes de Bruyn, plate 6, *Asellus callarias vel Asellus minor & Lucius* (a haddock and a snook), engraving, 205 x 290 mm, from Ahasuerus van Londerseel, *Libellus varia genera piscium complectens* (Antwerp, ca. 1594), London, British Museum, inv. no. 1931,0413.623.6. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



intersected with the broader Dutch collecting culture: preserved aquatic animals, including fish, were included collectors' cabinets.^[20] Rembrandt's, for example, contained both sea and land animals.^[21] In early modern collections, the surface textures of preserved animals could determine how such *naturalia* were ordered and classified.^[22] Collectors and naturalists experimented with various preservation techniques, such as drying or storing in alcohol, to retain the specimen's defining surface features. This task proved particularly difficult in the case of fish. Images of fish, which were often included in the same collections, offered a clear advantage over preserved fish: they provided a stable, lasting representation of the scales' color and sheen.^[23]

Painters from Metsu's native Leiden, such as Gerrit Dou (1613–75) and Frans van Mieris (1635–81), specialized in genre paintings of women selling or handling food, including fish (as in fig 3).^[24] Paintings by Dou, in particular, were highly appreciated for their fine and delicate brushwork and could be extremely valuable: a painting described as “een vrouken met pekelharinck” (a woman with a salted herring) was appraised at 1,000 *gulden* in a 1691 Antwerp inventory.^[25]

Metsu adopted the subject matter of these artists after his move from Leiden to Amsterdam in the mid-1650s, but he did not adopt the delicate and time-consuming painting style of these Leiden “fine painters.”^[26] Rather, he found his own distinct success in the Amsterdam art market through his free brushwork, capturing fresh fish with their glistening scales and depicting women with an empathy and human quality that still captivates us today.

- Marlise Rijks, 2026

Endnotes

1. Adriaan E. Waiboer, *Gabriel Metsu, Life and Work: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, 2012), 189–92, nos. A-41, A-42, A-43, A-44.
2. Thanks to Martien van Oijen (Naturalis Biodiversity Centre, Leiden) for helping with this identification.
3. A third painting from this group, *A Woman Cleaning Fish, with a Cat*, ca. 1656–58 (private collection), also includes three haddock and was described in a sale from 1800 as a “Schelvis Vrouwtje” (Haddock Woman). The latter differs from the two paintings in The Leiden Collection in that the woman looks sideways rather than directly toward the viewer. The full description in the sale reads: “Een Schelvis Vrouwtje. Zy staat buitenshuis voor een tafel, waarop drie schelvissen liggen, een van welke zy bezig is schoon te maaken; naast haar ligt een koperen emmer, op welke een kat zit. Dit stukje is mede bevallig en edel uitgevoerd.” See Adriaan Waiboer, *Gabriel Metsu, Life and Work: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, 2012), 191, A-44.
4. Metsu’s painting *An Old Woman Preparing Herring*, ca. 1661–63 (Musée Fabre, Montpellier Agglomération), likewise does not depict a customer, but the woman can be identified as an authorized Amsterdam street vendor because her cap and costume are in the official colors of red and black. See Linda Stone-Ferrier, “Gabriel Metsu’s Street Vendors: Shopping for Values in the Dutch Neighbourhood,” 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), 78.
5. Linda Stone-Ferrier, “Gabriel Metsu’s Street Vendors: Shopping for Values in the Dutch Neighbourhood,” 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), 78.
6. E.M. Kaveler, “Erotische elementen in de marktaferelen van Beuckelaer, Aertsen en hun Tijdgenoten,” in *Joachim Beuckelaer: Het markt- en keukenstuk in de Nederlanden, 1550–1650*, ed. Paul Verbraeken (Exh. cat. Gent, Museum voor Schone Kunsten) (Ghent, 1986), 18–26. See also E. de Jongh, “The Symbolism of Fish, Fisherman, Fishing Gear, and the Catch,” in *Fish: Still Lifes by Dutch and Flemish Masters, 1550–1700*, ed. Liesbeth M. Helmus (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Helsinki, Amos Anderson Art Museum) (Utrecht, 2004), 75–120; and E.A. Honig, “Desire and Domestic Economy,” *Art Bulletin* 83, no. 2 (2001): 294–315.
7. E.A. Honig, “Desire and Domestic Economy,” *Art Bulletin* 83, no. 2 (2001): 294–315.
8. Eric Jan Sluijter, *Seductress of Sight: Studies in Dutch Art of the Golden Age* (Zwolle, 2000), 275–76.
9. E.A. Honig, “Desire and Domestic Economy,” *Art Bulletin* 83, no. 2 (2001): 294–315; and Linda Stone-Ferrier, “Gabriel Metsu’s Street Vendors: Shopping for Values in the Dutch Neighbourhood,” 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), 93.
10. Linda Stone-Ferrier, “Gabriel Metsu’s Street Vendors: Shopping for Values in the Dutch

- Neighbourhood,” 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), 86.
11. Linda Stone-Ferrier mentions ten paintings of market exchanges as well as five paintings of single women cleaning and selling fish and vegetables. See Linda Stone-Ferrier, “Gabriel Metsu’s Street Vendors: Shopping for Values in the Dutch Neighbourhood,” 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), 73. While we know that these compositions were copied, no copy of *Woman with Carrots and Haddock* is known today, aside from one copy mentioned in documents. See Adriaan E. Waiboer, *Gabriel Metsu, Life and Work: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, 2012), 189, A-41.
 12. Linda Stone-Ferrier, “Gabriel Metsu’s Street Vendors: Shopping for Values in the Dutch Neighbourhood,” 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), 93.
 13. Janny van der Heijden, “Food in Rembrandt’s Day,” in *Art and Life in Rembrandt’s Time*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, H’ART Museum; West Palm Beach, Norton Museum of Art) (Zwolle, 2025), 37–38.
 14. F.P. Bennema and A.D. Rijnsdorp, “Fish Abundance, Fisheries, Fish Trade and Consumption in Sixteenth-Century Netherlands as Described by Adriaen Coenen,” *Fisheries Research* 161 (2015): 4, 9; and P. Nylandt, *Het schouw-toneel der aertsche schepselen* (Amsterdam, 1672), 268. For a digitized version of Coenen’s manuscript, see <https://www.kb.nl/ontdekken-bewonderen/topstukken/visboeck>.
 15. P. Nylandt, *Het schouw-toneel der aertsche schepselen* (Amsterdam, 1672), 268. A clearer depiction of the liver of a haddock can be seen, for instance, in Joachim Beuckelaer, *Fish Market*, 1568 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York); Alexander Adriaenssen, *Still Life of Fish and Oysters with a Cat*, ca. 1640–52 (Museo del Prado, Madrid); and in several fish still lifes by Abraham van Beijeren, Isaac van Duijnen, and Pieter Verbeeck. For the works by Van Beijeren, Van Duijnen, and Verbeeck, see Liesbeth M. Helmus, ed., *Fish: Still Lifes by Dutch and Flemish Masters, 1550–1700* (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Helsinki, Amos Anderson Art Museum) (Utrecht, 2004), 250–65, cat. nos. 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25.
 16. This publication dates to a few years before Collaert’s series of aquatic animals from 1598 titled *Piscium vivae icons*. M. Rikken, “Dieren verbeeld: Diervoorstellingen in tekeningen, prenten en schilderijen door kunstenaars uit de Zuidelijke Nederlanden tussen 1550 en 1630” (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2016), 69.
 17. At that time, cod was called *Asellus*, whiting *Asellus mollis*, and haddock—*schelvis* in Dutch—was known as *Asellus minor*. For the contemporary names, see Adrianus Junius, *The Nomenclator* (London, 1585), 65. Early modern writers already noticed the similarities between cod and haddock, and they were often mentioned in one breath. See, for example, P. Nylandt, *Het schouw-toneel der aertsche schepselen* (Amsterdam, 1672), 268–69.

18. Lex Raat, “A Miscellany of Fishes,” in *Fish: Still Lifes by Dutch and Flemish Masters, 1550–1700*, ed. Liesbeth M. Helmus (Exh. cat. Utrecht, Centraal Museum; Helsinki, Amos Anderson Art Museum) (Utrecht, 2004), 376–91; and Anne Overduin et al., “Fishing in the Past” research project, “Results” page, accessed 28 March 2025, <https://www.zooniverse.org/projects/anneoverduin/fishing-in-the-past/about/results>. Searching the RKD image database for “haddock” in the seventeenth century yields 124 results. In six inventories from Amsterdam in the 1660s and 1670s, the specific term “schelviszen” (haddock) was used in the description of paintings. See the Montias database of 17th Century Dutch Art Inventories, Frick Collection, accessed 31 March 2025, <https://research.frick.org/montias/>: Anslø, Jan Claass, inv. no. 113 (1671); Haes, Aert de, inv. no. 175 (1670); Hommess, Hendrijck, inv. no. 107 (1664); Kerckhoven, Anna van der, inv. no. 124 (1666); Malfaut, Philippe, inv. no. 204 (1660); and Vogel, Magdalena de, inv. no. 209 (1661).
19. Netherlandish painters were renowned for their imitation of materials and depictions of the play of light upon different textures, while Netherlandish art theorists from Karel van Mander (*reflexy-const*) to Samuel van Hoogstraten paid attention to optical phenomenon and theories. See Thijs Weststeijn, *The Visible World: Samuel Van Hoogstraten’s Art Theory and the Legitimation of Painting in the Dutch Golden Age* (Amsterdam, 2008), 329–47. The fascination with the surface textures of aquatic animals (the scales, skins, and carapaces) was an important factor in Dutch paintings’ appeal to collectors. See Marlise Rijks, “Skales, Skins, and Carapaces,” in *The Matter of Mimesis: Studies of Mimesis and Materials in Nature, Art, and Science*, ed. Marjolijn Bol and E.C. Spary (Leiden, 2023), 297.
20. Marlise Rijks, “Skales, Skins, and Carapaces,” in *The Matter of Mimesis: Studies of Mimesis and Materials in Nature, Art, and Science*, ed. Marjolijn Bol and E.C. Spary (Leiden, 2023), 293–320.
21. Montias Database of 17th Century Dutch Art Inventories, Frick Collection, accessed 31 March 2025, <https://research.frick.org/montias/>: Rembrandt, inv. no. 1262 (1656), lots 134, 136, 173, 264. See also Bob van den Boogert, ed., *Rembrandts schatkamer* (Zwolle, 1999), 149–51; and H. Perry Chapman, “Rembrandt on Display: The Rembrandthuis as Portrait of an Artist,” *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 65 (2015): 202–39.
22. This approach could lead to unexpected classificatory moves, for instance the grouping together of various animals and stones based upon the shared characteristic of a hard skin and spiky excrescences, as seen in an album of Emperor Rudolf II. See Florike Egmond, *Eye for Detail: Images of Plants and Animals in Art and Science, 1500–1630* (London, 2017), 57–58.
23. Marlise Rijks, “Skales, Skins, and Carapaces,” in *The Matter of Mimesis: Studies of Mimesis and Materials in Nature, Art, and Science*, ed. Marjolijn Bol and E.C. Spary (Leiden, 2023), 304–5.
24. In the seventeenth century, Dutch art buyers increasingly favored still lifes and genre scenes. Both started at around 3 percent of the total number of paintings listed in inventories at the beginning of century, increasing to around 11 percent for still life and around 14 percent for genre paintings toward the end of the century. See Marten Jan Bok, “‘Schilderijen te coop’: Nieuwe marketingtechnieken op de Nederlandse kunstmarkt van de Gouden Eeuw,” in *Thuis in de Gouden Eeuw* (Zwolle, 2008), 20. For a comparison between Delft in the Dutch Republic and Antwerp in the Southern Netherlands, see Jeffrey

M. Muller, “Netherlands: Ownership and Display of Paintings in Domestic Interiors,” in *The Age of Rubens*, ed. Peter C. Sutton (Exh. cat., Boston, Museum of Fine Arts; Ghent, Museum voor Schone Kunst, 1993) (Boston, 1993), 195–203.

In some cases, contemporary Amsterdam inventories described genre paintings by subject, such as “a woman cleaning fish” (“1 schilderij van een vrouw die vis schoonmaect f 3:16”) or “a woman buying herring from a boy” (“een schilderytge van een vrouw die haringh coopt van een jonge in een ebbehout cas 100 f.,”) without naming the artist. These works could range widely in value: the former was appraised at a modest 3 *gulden* and 16 *stuivers*, while the latter at a handsome 100 *gulden*. See Marlise Rijks, “A Taste For Fish: Paintings of Aquatic Animals in the Low Countries (1560–1729),” in *Ichthyology in Context (1500–1880)*, ed. Florike Egmond and Paul J. Smith (Leiden, 2024), 259–97. Montias Database of 17th Century Dutch Art Inventories, Frick Collection, accessed 25 March 2025, <https://research.frick.org/montias>: Brusselman, Isaacq, inv. no. lot 615.0003 (1625); and Arras, Odelia van, inv. no. lot 460.0009 (1671).

25. This inventory documented the collection of Theresia Maria Anthoine. See Marlise Rijks, “A Taste For Fish: Paintings of Aquatic Animals in the Low Countries (1560–1729),” in *Ichthyology in Context (1500–1880)*, ed. F. Egmond and Paul J. Smith (Leiden, 2024), 284–85; and Erik Duverger, *Antwerpse kunstinventarissen uit de zeventiende eeuw* (Brussels, 1984–2009), 12: 84–99. Metsu, on the other hand, is not mentioned in seventeenth-century Antwerp inventories, but his paintings do appear in seven Amsterdam inventories from the 1660s and 1670s. However, none of the paintings described match *Woman with Carrots and Haddock*. And only one of Metsu’s paintings is valued in these inventories, a “slypertje” (probably a knife sharpener) listed at fifty *gulden*, a reasonable amount but not comparable to the value of Dou’s paintings. See Montias Database of 17th Century Dutch Art Inventories, Frick Collection, accessed 25 March 2025, <https://research.frick.org/montias>: Branthout, Geerebrandt Warnaearts, inv. no. 1348 (1665); Fris, Pieter, inv. no. 536 (1668); Douci, Laurens Mauritsz., inv. no. 285 (1669); Silkens, Michiel (II), inv. no. 173 (1671); Uylenborgh (Uylenburgh), Gerridt (Gerard), inv. no. 1357 (1675); Welsingh, Jan, inv. no. 461 (1675); and Becker, Herman, inv. no. 254 (1678).

26. See the biography of Gabriel Metsu by Piet Bakker in this catalogue.

Provenance

- Charles Tyson Yerkes (1837–1905), New York, by 1904 (his sale, American Art Association, New York, 7 April 1910, no. 97 [to F. Kleinberger Galleries for \$2,800]).
- [F. Kleinberger Galleries, Paris and New York (to W. Böhler for 25,000 francs).]
- [Julius Böhler, Munich, 1912.]
- Private collection, South America (sale, Sotheby’s, New York, 25 January 2007, no. 18 [to Johnny Van Haeften]).



- [Johnny Van Haeften, Ltd, London].
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2007.

Exhibition History

- Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, on loan with the permanent collection, January 2011–January 2015 [lent by the present owner].

References

- *Catalogue of Paintings and Sculpture in the Collection of Charles T. Yerkes, esq., New York*. New York, 1904, 1: no. 61.
- Hofstede de Groot, Cornelis. *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*. Stuttgart, 1907, 1: 286, no. 125A (added later by Hofstede de Groot in pencil in the author's personal copy, now preserved at the RKD, The Hague).
- Kleinberger Galleries. *A Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue of 150 Paintings by Old Masters of the Dutch, Flemish, German, Italian, Spanish and French Schools from the Kleinberger Galleries*. Paris, 1911, no. 42.
- Robinson, F.W. *Gabriel Metsu (1610–1667): A Study of His Place in Dutch Genre Painting of the Golden Age*. New York, 1974, 45; 160, fig. 101.