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Peter Van Boucle
Still life with a boar's head, c. 1660

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PETER VAN BOUCLE
(Antwerp 1610 – 1673 Paris)

STILL LIFE WITH A BOAR'S HEAD, c. 1660

Oil on canvas
70 x 100 cm; 27 1/2 x 39 3/8 in.

Provenance

Private Collection, Italy.



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We would like to thank Dr. Fred Meijer for confirming the attribution after the examination of the work.

Peter van Boucle (Antwerp 1610 – Paris 1673) holds a significant place in the evolution of 17th-century still-life painting, straddling Flemish and French traditions. Thought to have trained under Frans Snyders, his works, often featuring lavish arrangements of game and produce on rustic tables, reflect his technical mastery and nuanced use of detail.

Fleeing the turmoil of the Thirty Years' War, van Boucle moved to Paris with his father, Carel van Boucle, an engraver. They settled in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, a district outside the city walls that allowed foreign artists to work free from the restrictions imposed by Parisian guilds. Carel was recorded there in 1617, with Peter joining him by 1623. Though based in France, van Boucle maintained his connections to Antwerp, where he was active between 1632 and 1636 as a member of the Guild of Saint Luke, earning acclaim for his sought-after still lifes. By the late 1640s, van Boucle had returned permanently to Paris, where his reputation flourished. His patrons included King Louis XIV, who owned two of his works, and the prominent collector Everard Jabach.¹ A prolific painter, he specialised in still-lifes of flowers, fruit, and game, often painting alongside with artists like Lubin Baugin, Peter Binoit, and Jacques Linard. He also contributed designs for Gobelins tapestries, working alongside Simon Vouet.

In a somber yet refined composition, the present canvas centres on the severed head of a boar, depicted with striking realism. The coarse texture of the fur, the weight of the flesh, and the lifeless snout showcases the artist's technical prowess. The boar's head rests on a white cloth streaked with faint traces of blood, its folds rendered with meticulous attention to light and shadow. The contrast with the dark, undefined background, draws the viewer's focus firmly to the objects in the foreground. To the right, two onions are rendered in warm, earthy tone, while a knife and a rustic jug to the left balance the arrangement, providing an understated harmony. Fred Meijer compares the present composition to several of Van Boucle's still-lifes of fish, which include the same type of knife and very similar groups of onions (see for example Figs. 1 and 2). The placing and treatment of the white cloth are also typical of the artist (Figs. 3-5). While not as prominently as in the present case, the boar's head features in other contemporary works by van Boucle (Figs. 6-8).

¹ See Bailly's inventory in Michel Faré, *Le Grand Siècle de la Nature Morte en France: le XVII Siecle*, Paris 1974, p. 102.

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Peter van Boucle's mature style married the Baroque grandeur of the of the Antwerp school with the refinement and delicacy of French classicism. Moreover, he exercised a relevant influence on eighteenth-century French artists, which can be seen in the animal paintings of Oudry and Desportes and the still-lifes of Chardin.

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Fig. 1. Peter van Boucle, *Still-life with a carp*, signed with monogram and dated 1651, oil on canvas.
Location unknown.

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Fig. 2. Peter van Boucle, *Still-life with a carp*, oil on canvas.
Location unknown.

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Fig. 3. Peter van Boucle, *Still-life of game and fruit with dogs*, with monogram and dated 1664, oil on canvas. Location unknown.

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Fig. 4. Peter van Boucle, *Poultry, chickens and fruit on a table with an open window on the right and two dogs in the foreground*, oil on canvas.

Location unknown.



Fig. 5. Peter van Boucle, *Still-life with game on a table with an open window on the right and a dog in the foreground*, oil on canvas.

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Fig. 6. Peter van Boucle, *A boar's head and artichokes in an urn, fruit in wanli dishes and dead game on a ledge by a casement, a lurcher in the foreground*, oil on canvas.
Location unknown.



Fig. 7. Peter van Boucle, *A boar's head and fruits in an urn and dead game on a table covered with a red and a white cloth, a lurcher in the foreground*, signed with monogram and dated 1646 [?], oil on canvas. Location unknown.

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Fig. 8. Peter van Boucle, *A boar's head and fruits in an urn and dead game on a table covered with a white cloth, a lurcher in the foreground*, signed with monogram and dated 16[5]0, oil on canvas.
Location unknown.

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