

# SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI

## THUS PASSES THE GLORY OF THE WORLD

Worldly things are so ephemeral. . . Flowers, like riches, are momentary; knowledge is fragile if not passed on. Even feelings are transient and precarious, even though written in black ink that seems durable, the medium is still a light feather that outlines the words on a delicate sheet of paper.

A letter is a sure way of putting down on paper what is in your heart, but feelings remain as fleeting as the reflections on an hourglass and as ephemeral as soap bubbles that disperse and disappear.

Almost in comparison, the wick burns and consumes the candle, while the sand falls through the neck of the hourglass, marking the quick passing of this instant and the glory of the world that can vanish in a flash.



### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- My inspiration for the theme and subjects of this photograph came from Pieter Claesz's harmonious painting "Vanitas", 1625.
- I intentionally kept the resting surface of the objects black, as if there was an empty space. In some images I decided on this composition to emphasise the sense of precariousness. The impermanence of a base, the insecurity of a support, the uncertainty of a resting surface are the figurative expressions of our fragility.

The photo is set in a small corner, where a young woman reads and answers her letters. The view is too small to understand the mood of the girl without using words; exactly like the letters painted by Dutch painters whose words could not be made out, where everyone is free to use their imagination and write down their own thoughts.

The scene offers an introspective game of viewpoints that allude to love and its vanity. This feeling is celebrated by a bouquet of red roses.

The painting reveals the real sense of the letter, by virtue of the curtain that, as a symbol of discovery, reveals it in the background. The sea and ships were very popular as symbols in discourses of love: ships and seamen represented the lovers, while the sea was love.

This picture within a picture makes it clear that it is a love letter, while the stormy sea invokes its pain and torment, perhaps best described by the amorous emblem:

Al zyt ghy veft, noyt uyt het Haft  
de ongebonde Zee, vol spooreloose baren  
Doet tusschen hoop en vrees, mijn lievend' hafte varen:  
De liefd' is als een Zee, een Minnaer al een schip,  
U gonst de haven lief, u af keer is een klip;  
Indien het schip vervalt (door af keer) comt te stranden,  
Soo is de hoop te niet van veylich te belanden:  
De haven uwes gonst, my toont by liefdens baeck,  
Op dat ick uyt de Zee van liefdens vreesse raeck.

The thimble, together with the diligent and virtuous stitch work, represents the young girl who was painfully pushed away by her lover. It waits alone for a finger to put it on.

The reading of the image is guided by a viewing mechanism hidden in the reflections of the teapot, in the mirror that indifferently looks elsewhere, in the lens and painting.

#### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- Inspiration: Gabriël Metsu “Woman Reading a Letter”, oil on panel.
- The painting with the small ship is by Willem van de Velde the Younger, “The gust”, 1680
- The epigram belongs to the collection of poetic writings entitled “Minne-beelden” by Jan Harmenszoon Krul, published in 1639:

Though you are far away, you are always in my heart  
On the unbounded sea of trackless waves  
My amorous heart sails between hope and fear:  
Love is like the sea, a lover like a ship,  
Your favour a safe harbour, your rejection a rock;  
If the ship were to run aground,  
All hope of a safe return would be dashed:  
Show the harbour of your favour, with a beacon of love,  
So that I may escape the sea of the fear to love.

## THE LETTER



The constant fear of being overwhelmed by happiness, a feeling capable of leading astray and corrupting even the purest people with noble thoughts, which led society of that time to constant moral conflict between the home environment and the outside world. The home was the salvation against materialism, trade and the various customs imposed by society, which were indispensable but dissolute.

The vanity of valuable objects, refined foods, the excessive attachment to earthly goods and the aversion to separating from them, as well as the inoperability and indolence of doing good deeds were controlled by domestic life and by its virtues. Sobriety, frugality, prudence and humility countered the possibility to prejudice one's soul. The home cleansed one's integrity.

In this glimpse of domestic intimacy, I wanted to create a calm and silent environment, furnished by everyday objects where the lace and needlepoint are the means to ennoble one's soul and morals, also consolidated by the presence of anonymous prayer books.

Pumpkins and dried flowers, as symbols of redemption, are accompanied by the light of the burning candle, an emblem of hope.

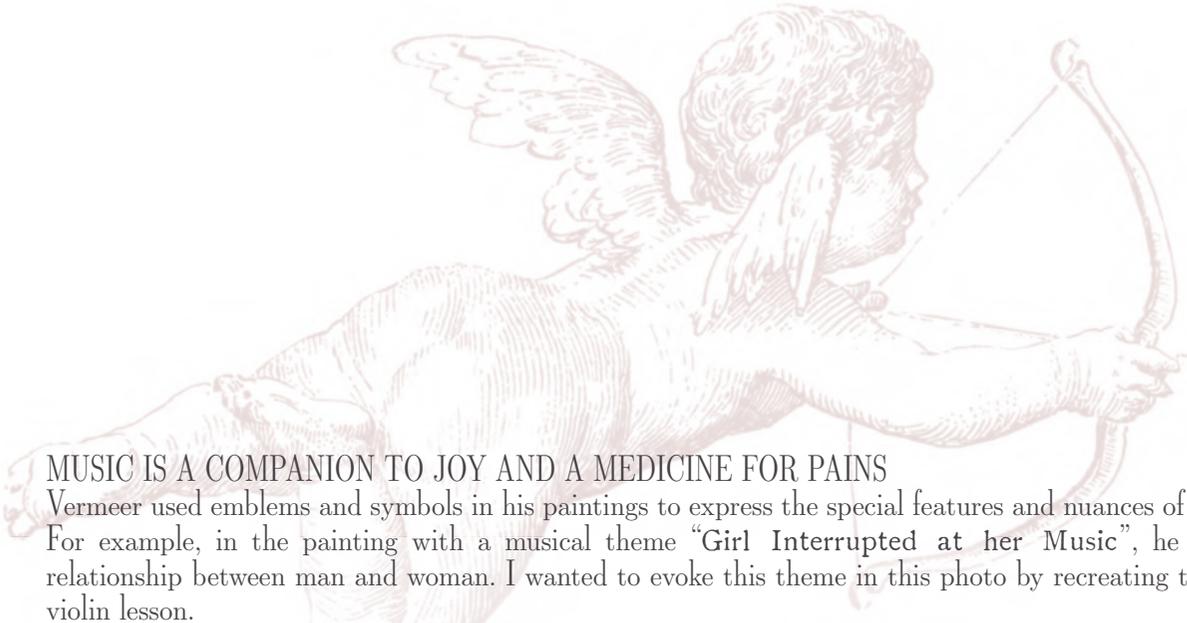
The tile, in typical Delft porcelain, depicts cupid, a symbol of love, and of rebellious and lively souls. The spindle, a metaphor for the virtuous woman, brings balance and salvation to the state of harmony and grace of one's principles.

#### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- I was inspired by Jan Vermeer's representation of the domestic virtues of women in his painting "The Lacemaker." I wanted a small reference to the yellow silk dress due to the vitality it creates, directed to the manual work that, more than the young woman, is the protagonist of this painting.
- The potatoes in the bowl on the right were served boiled to collect the starch needed to stiffen the lace.

## THE LACEMAKER





## MUSICA LAETITIAE COMES MEDICINA DOLORUM

### MUSIC IS A COMPANION TO JOY AND A MEDICINE FOR PAINS

Vermeer used emblems and symbols in his paintings to express the special features and nuances of social relations. For example, in the painting with a musical theme “Girl Interrupted at her Music”, he focused on the relationship between man and woman. I wanted to evoke this theme in this photo by recreating the moment of a violin lesson.

The wine and letter are emblematically linked to the theme of courtship, a concept supported by the presence of the picture within a picture depicting a full-length cupid. The young girl playing the violin can be seen in the mirror, wearing a dress that leaves one shoulder bare. She is probably preoccupied and distracted by her teacher... At that time, music lessons were one of the few occasions in which an unmarried woman could be alone with a man, hence the dried roses which remind her to make the most of these moments while she can.



### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- The picture within a picture depicting Cupid is a detail from Francesco Albani's “Venus and Cupid”, which was painted in the Bologna workshop of the Flemish painter, Denis Calvaert.
- The young woman reflected in the mirror is a detail of the painting “Woman playing the violin” by Gerrit van Honthorst
- The letter was written by Maria Strick, the only Dutch woman to work as a calligrapher and script engraver. Active in Delft and Rotterdam between 1593 and 1630, she created four calligraphy books with the help of her cobbler husband who, to print the designs of his wife, became a highly skilled engraver.

A still life painting can go from being a modest interior accessory to a bearer of philosophical thoughts: an anthem to time and its inexorable passing, where everything is a vain attempt to stop it.

A young lady looks at herself in the mirror every day, she puts on perfume and brushes her hair. The withering of the flowers reminds her that her beauty will also fade; a skull emerges from afar and is reflected in the mirror, a daily and silent narrator of our ephemeral reflected image.

The clock shows the day and divides it into hours, and has written out in dark notes for those who know how to read them: we always die.

A depressing future image, with a heavy meaning where death is the end of every human action: a clear warning not to waste life and its moments.

Special references, interesting facts, notes:

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- The quote was taken from “The Clock” by the Friulan poet and writer *Ciro di Pers.*

The moving engine with its toothed cogs  
lacerates the day and divides it into hours,  
and has written out with dark notes  
for those who know how to read them: we always die.  
While the concave metal ticks,  
a funereal voice resounds in my heart;  
nor can fate be better signified  
than by the cruel tenor of its brazen voice.  
Because I never hope for rest or peace,  
this, which seems like a drum and a trumpet,  
always dares me to confront my voracious age.  
And with those beats from which the metal resounds,  
hasten the pace towards the fleeting century,  
And to make it open, knocks every hour at the tomb.

BEAUTY



## TIME IS AN ILLUSION

Bishop Augustine of Hippo said, "What is time? If you don't ask me I know; but if you ask me I don't know."

Looking at the image from left to right, you can see the present time, full of fresh fruits and flowers, precious jewellery, pearls. In contrast, on the right side, the buds have withered, the fruit has been eaten, the glasses are empty or tipped over, the books are worn, the candles have burned out. In the middle is a silk stole that, with its golden-like colour, reminds us of how precious time is, marked by the advancing of an hourglass.

The fleeting nature of moments measured between present and future.

Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- The title is a quote by Albert Einstein.



This image is filled with the concept of caducity.

The symbols perfectly representing the ineluctability of death, like the skull and unlit candles, are next to the hourglass and pocket watch that silently remind us of how fast time goes by. Before disappearing, soap bubbles, a sign of the fragility of the human condition, fall gently on the coins, riches and necklaces, allegories of worldly and lucrative activities. Lying under the skull is a sonnet written by Gryphius entitled "Es ist alles Eitel" (Everything is vanity). The theme of the composition is elaborated through a search for oppositional formulations: the expression of an element followed by its opposite. The precariousness of this balance reveals how nature must follow the same rules of impermanence governing the human world.

In fact, the fresh, lush flowers on the left contrast with the now dried and withered roses, intentionally placed next to the painting of the young lady. Beauty and youth are fragile and transient, just like a flower. The picture within a picture is an integral part of the other objects placed in the scene as a document and reference to vanitas. I chose this painting because the woman looking in the mirror appears to be different than her reflection, which gives me the idea of a younger face than the one actually in front of the mirror. I see the story of the past and present of a rich lady who realises that there is only one possibility for her final goal.

The awareness of the Memento Mori ("Remember you are to die") should encourage people to be better, to be more just, open to brotherhood and sharing, and not let insipidity and moral blindness illuminate their spirit.

Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- The picture within the picture is by a Dutch painter from the 16th-17th century, "Portrait of a woman looking in the mirror."
- Andreas Gryphius (1616-1664) was a German poet and playwright. His recurring themes were pain, torment, and barbarisation caused by wars, vanity of the condition and human works and the caducity of desires. The sonnet is as follows:

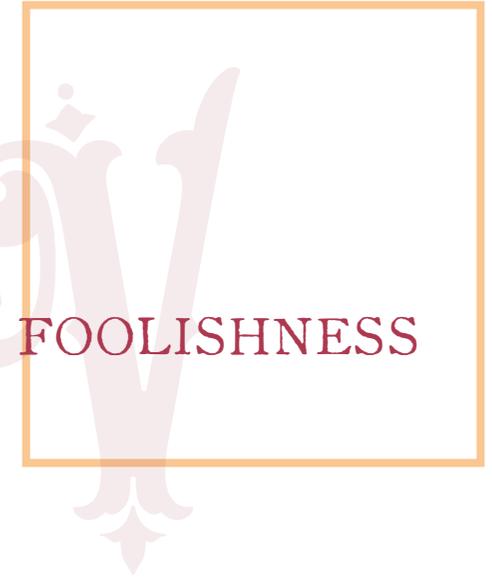
Look anywhere you will, the Earth is an empty show.  
What someone builds today, another soon tears down:  
where now a city stands, will be a grassy mound  
A place that only shepherds grazing their flocks will know:

what blooms so fair at daybreak, by noon is trampled low;  
what bravely struts and strives soon turns to ash and bone;  
no substance lasts forever, no marble, no brass.  
One moment fortune smiles, the next brings bitter woe.

Tales of our mighty deeds like dreams must fade away.  
How then should man – time's plaything – ever hope to stay?  
Oh think, what are those objects we prize beyond compare,

mere shadows, dust and wind – all worthless, false and vain;  
field flowers glimpsed in passing and never see again!  
For that which is immortal, no man seems to care.

## VANITY AND FOOLISHNESS



## THE TEMPERANCE

The objects, in addition to their appearance, i.e. their form, aspect and function, can also project us into their symbolic sphere.

Thus, in addition to the real and concrete aspect of a small table, this hides a symbolic meaning that exhorts moderation and regularity.

Some subjects bring to mind the special features of the four elements: the cold and dry mood of the tobacco recalls the earth, the cold and wet mood of the strawberries recalls water, the hot and dry wick of the candle recalls fire and the wine that arouses the senses with its warm and moist mood recalls air.

Balance and measurement guarantees health and wellbeing by revealing the morality hidden in a fine exhortation to temperance.

### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- For this composition and the quotes in the relative text I was inspired by Alessandra Ruffino's book "Vanitas vs Veritas" which mentions the painting, "Still life in a niche with glasses and pipe" by Georg Flegel, a painter who painted tables set with food and flowers, with the occasional animal.



The religious Calvinist tended to perform ostentatious gestures of charity or to engage in charitable works in order to avoid damnation due to the accumulation of riches, which was considered the sin of greed.

Devotees lived with the constant fear of being corrupted by happiness, every vice required a sort of compensation to ensure redemption and salvation. On this table you can see how uncomfortable excesses were rebalanced to ensure beatitude.

The cutting board with bread and the milk jug are images of modesty, they are flanked by luxurious fresh and exotic fruit, displayed on a crystal fruit stand but also in a more everyday bowl. The sumptuous and elegant Römer glass is filled with red wine. The simple white napkin is modest, resting behind the glass, it is joined by luxurious brocade fabrics and heavy curtains tied with tassels. The feathers are not only a symbol of fragility but also of luxury that accompanies the ostentation of jewellery, chinoiserie, and shells. Excess is rebalanced by the sobriety of a small oil lamp and its snuffer. By the exhibitionism of the red roses and perfumes and by the game that saves us thanks to the pearls, a symbol of modesty and virtue. Self-realisation, coming from economic power, is mitigated by civic duty. In fact, the coins collected on the right are set aside for charities and, like two plates of a scale, give balance to the reproductions of the Nautilus cups produced by Cornelis van Bellekin, placed on the left and waiting to be purchased.

As already mentioned, the moods and characteristics of strawberries, wine, tobacco and wicks are an invitation to temperance and moderation.

The text, left suspended next to the pipe and tobacco, is a controversial script published in 1661 at Maassluis which makes accusations against the Dutch ruling class, denouncing its attachment to money and not to God and eternal salvation.

## BETWEEN SIN AND DELIVERANCE



### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- Text published at Maassluis in 1661:  
O Netherlands will you not turn from sin and unrighteousness, and walk once more in the ways of the God. Before He stretches out His hand over all Netherlanders so that sinners shall fall. What is heard but swearing and cursing? What is to be seen but drunkenness and pomp and daily trafficking in vile gain? A star in the heavens plain was seen in the southeast, with rays both great and small. What is this if not a sign that God will punish all our sins.
- Cornelis van Bellekin (1625 - 1701) was a Dutch craftsman who produced expensive cups using Nautilus Pompilius, shells imported from the East India Company. These shells were mounted on supports to make them resemble glasses, then decorated and painted. Drinking from one of these cups, though very uncomfortable, was a sign of social accomplishment and wealth. They were objects to show off at grand occasions.

Still life paintings also concealed a subtle self-congratulatory need to rejoice in one's affluence, indulging on rich and excellent products of the country: flowers, optical instruments, handcrafted glassware, pewter jugs, heavy and prized fabrics, fruits, perfumes...

But behind this tribute lies the vanity of pleasure offered fleetingly to the five human senses. Touch is pleasantly satisfied by the heavy textures of the fabrics, the coarse lacework or smooth surface of the tray; or gratified by holding precious jewellery pieces and feeling the smooth surface of the pearls, without however feeling too guilty given their metaphorical symbol of purity.

Smell is made happy with the pleasant notes of beer, flowers or fruits, but also with the scents contained inside the precious perfume bottles.

Taste is rewarded by the flavours of ripe fruits, fresh beer and nuts.

Hearing finds its enjoyment listening to its favourite music. The score reminds us that it is also marked by precise tempos, making it as fragile as the other things.

Sight, supported by the lenses of the eye glasses, reminds us of the importance of discoveries, of that historical period focused on optical, physical and mathematical sciences.

The pumpkins in the basket, in the background but with equal dignity, are the symbolic tools that lead us to redemption. They recall the brevity of life and vain hopes. The bigger the fruits, the more unexpected, fragile and transient they are, as is luck.

## THE FIVE SENSES



### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- Northern Europe, Germany, and the Netherlands developed the ancient cervisia so that it had a quality and style very similar to modern beer. The water needed to produce beer was transported in barrels on the Brouwersgracht, the brewery canal. The main production and storage activities took place along its banks; salnitra, leather, coffee, spices and whale oil were also processed and stored here. Starting from the 15th century, a mug called humpen, was used to drink beer. Since the 17th century, however, the undisputed favourite recipient to drink beer is the glass, thanks to the introduction of lead oxide in glass paste, whose elegant transparency enhances the colour, characteristics and foam of the beer. To celebrate the famous tulips and the "Gouden Eeuw" (Golden Age), the Jopen brewery located inside the Jopenkerk church of Haarlem, designed and launched a new beer called the Tulpomaniabier.

This is a small corner of the home of a traveller, a merchant, a seaman. It depicts a moment suspended between rest and work, between sleepiness and dreams, reality and daily life.

It is a historical moment of great geographic and scientific research: travels, discoveries, the universe, lands and skies... The Netherlands is the Country of the lens, microscope and geographical maps. Research unites with art to create a combination of reason, technique, poetry and beauty. The importance of observation is essential for accessing knowledge.

The four elements of matter are also present in the composition. The black velvet carpet welcomes all the other objects, like the earth welcomes life.

Nautical cartridges and the sextant evokes water, a source and fountain of life. The aerial world is represented by the terrestrial globe. It reminds us that air is a source of energy, intangible and fundamental. The fire represents the light of the sun, which hits the shoulders and warms the back.

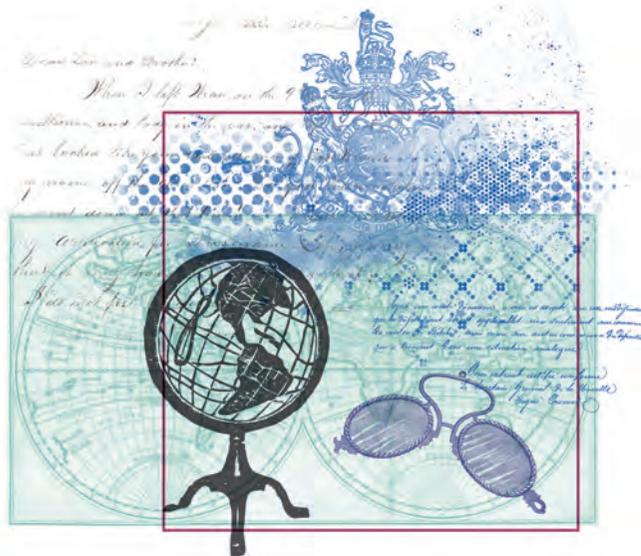
Fruits, spices, sugar, shells, fragrances and other elements connect the protagonist to distant landscapes, to trade activities with Dutch colonial territories, perhaps to a friendship with a governor of the East Indies.

A Chinese porcelain jug stands behind the sextant; a little further to the left, recognisable by the characteristic blue, is a Delft china plate.

The reflections on the objects refer to the windows behind them. The front of the curtains is pulled and framed by brocade ties. This closure helps to separate this small private corner, to give the sense of a quiet and restrained, almost suspended atmosphere.

The various colours and shapes continually shifts the eye to the various objects; it is a way to build a story, reinvent the moment, arouse interest, curiosity and mystery about the character.

## FARAWAY LANDS



### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- Maps:
  - Cornelis Anthonisz (painter), View of Amsterdam, 1538
  - Willem Janszoon Blaeu (cartographer and navigator, illustrator of maps in the Dutch East India Company), Nova totius terrarum orbis geographica ac hydrographica tabula, Amsterdam 1635
  - Johannes Van Keulen Amsterdam (cartographer), East Indies, Amsterdam 1690
- Delftware:

The main feature was the blue decorations, hence the name the blue of Delft, Delfts Blauw. The local production competed with China but, following a crisis in the Chinese market, Dutch potters took the time to study the methods and to refine the technique. A very elegant product was created, which is still famous today.

# MEMENTO MORI

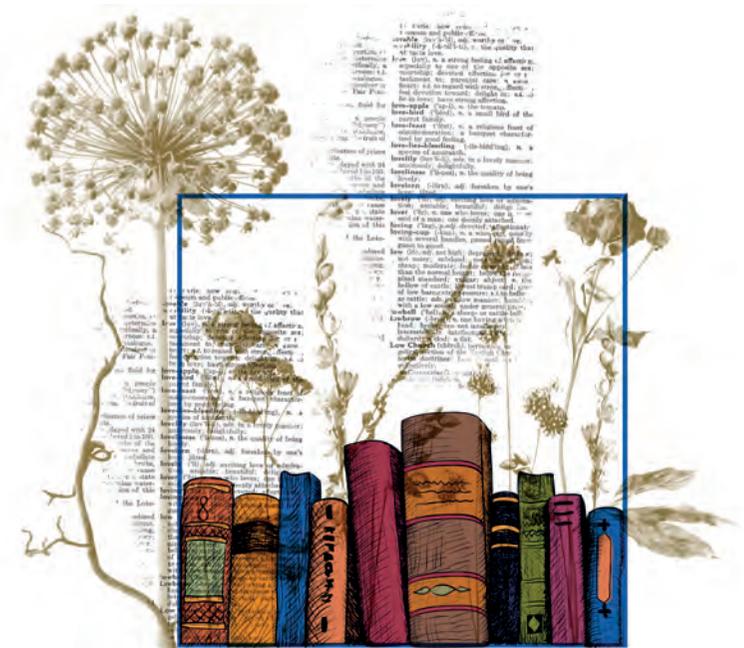
## REMEMBER THAT YOU WILL DIE

This famous Latin phrase reminds us that we all share the same destiny. The intuition of transience comes from the various elements that emphasise the inevitability of death or its drawing near: the glass with nothing to drink in it, not wine or beer, the roses, gathered in a bouquet, keep their original shades, but are now dry, the pocket watch marks the drawing near of a goal, emphasised by a skull placed on top of it. The only connection to life comes from the prized fabrics, shells and books, which are the only links to one's existence comprising goods, personal items and knowledge.

### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- To express the concept of this image, I followed the Dutch verse hidden in the painting "Vanitas with skull", 1630, by a painter from the circle of Pieter Claesz:

The glass is empty.  
The time has gone.  
The light is off.  
Man is silent.



This photo hides a moral, evoked by the bookmark with the illustration of an owl in the centre of the composition. Wat baeter kaers of bril als den uijl niet sien en wil? What's the use of a candle and glasses if the owl doesn't want to see?

Knowledge is a light in the dark but, this seventeenth century proverb wants to place the attention on the uselessness of study for men who are unable to understand and separate theory from reality.

The owl goes from being a symbol of wisdom to one of stupidity and madness, since it prefers the dark and the night instead of the light and day. The candle and glasses reinforce this concept.

By looking at the image from left to right, we first see the intense light as life, knowledge, understanding; on the opposite side, there is darkness, death, ignorance, unawareness. These concepts are highlighted by the presence of a snuffer resting on the book, it is within easy reach to put out the flame.

This corner of the house is very dark, illuminated by a small candle that has almost burnt out, but from the windows behind it, one can still see that it is still daylight. This arrangement reinforces the idea of the owl's foolishness and stupidity. The importance of knowledge is emphasised by the image of a person near the windows who uses the light filtering through the curtains to read; only his reflection can be seen in the lens of the glasses and in the drinking glasses.

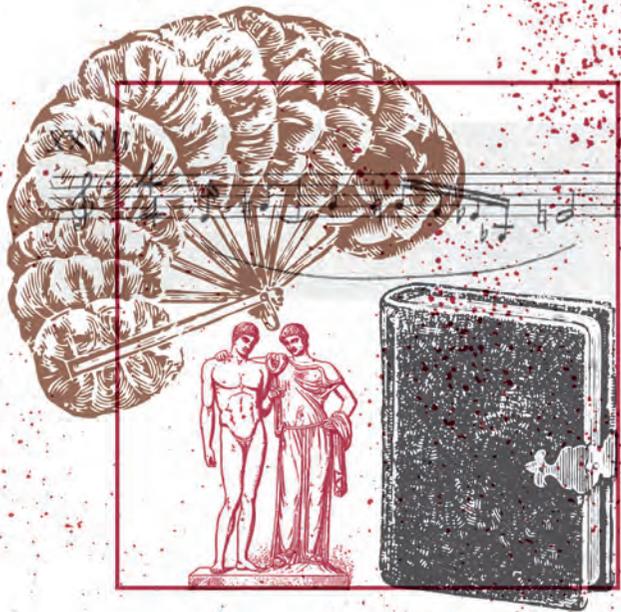
KNOWLEDGE



#### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- The Römer wineglass:  
This large wineglass decorated the tables of noble people in the 17th century. The top part of the Römer glass was shaped like a hemisphere, either smooth or decorated by diamond-shaped engravings, while the bottom part consisted of an open stem studded with glass drops or prunts (called Nuppen). The characteristic beauty of the glass comes from the natural green nuances of glass (Waldglas).
- For this photo based on reflections, I drew inspiration from the painting "Still Life with Lit Candle" by Pieter Claesz, 1627. In his painting, Claesz reproduced all the reflections coming from the candle light in the wineglass and the actual small candle can be seen reflected in the green Römer glass.

## ART, HATE, POWER AND JUDGEMENT



The books and the portrait, seen also as a continuity of art, remind us of the themes relating to the vanity of the world: the vanity of feelings such as hate and ambiguity that inevitably lead to a final judgement and to the vanity of power given by knowledge. The sanguine portrait, like paper, does not last long, the vanity of the artist's effort is combined with the vanity of knowledge. The feathers, tied in a fan-shape, are delicate, frivolous and illusory. The skull, anciently linked to Cronus (Saturn) appears as a symbol of time, conserving its power on the objects around it.

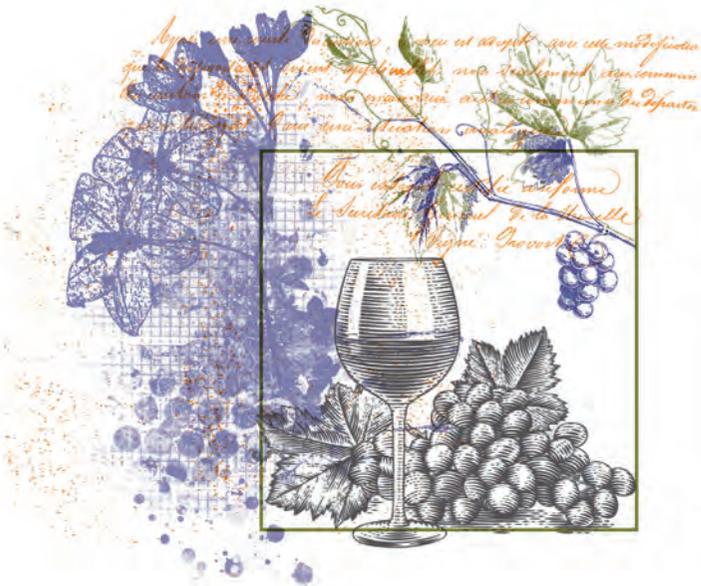
### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- For the theme and concepts, I was inspired by “Still Life with a Feather Fan” by Juriaen van Streeck.
- The book in the middle of the photo is “Elektra” by Sofocle, a tragedy of hate speech, translated by Joost van den Vondel, 17th century Dutch poet and playwright.
- The sanguine painting is a 1640 self-portrait of the Dutch painter and designer of the Golden Age, Philips Wouwerman.

# BREAKFAST

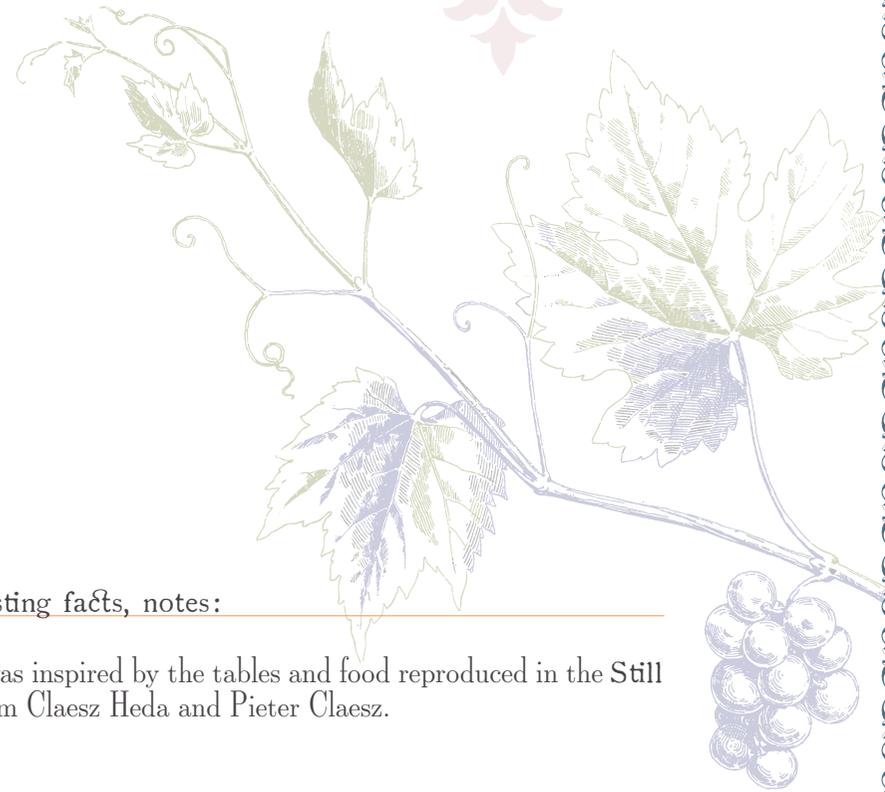
The scene depicts a moment of daily life, a table laid for breakfast that has already begun, but seems to have been interrupted, stopped in an instant destined to remain motionless. The colours evoke shades of brown, grey, white and green. The yellow of the lemon adds a lively touch.

The symbolic meaning is hidden and, almost silently, recalls the constant themes of the Vanitas. The peel of the lemon and fresh fruits alludes to the transience of time, while the ostriches and spices allude to the brevity of life and earthly things.



Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- For this composition I was inspired by the tables and food reproduced in the Still Life paintings of Willem Claesz Heda and Pieter Claesz.



## ANTIEK FLUWEEL

The Antiek fluweel (antique velvet) is to remind us of the uniqueness of the floral masterpieces by Brueghel the Elder. In Italy he was nicknamed Velvet Brueghel due to his velvety, intense and precious colours.

The seasonality of the flowers becomes secondary, the composition must be a blaze of beauty and colours.

A basket full of cut-off flowers becomes a single object. Almost unnatural flowers become a symbol, as a whole, of fleeting beauty. The feather, almost imperceptibly resting on the jewellery box, is just as light, fragile, transient and brief as a flower. Linked to pleasure and worldly things, the ornaments donate short-lived happiness. Everything is useless when faced with the flight of time.

### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- Jan Brueghel the Elder lived in Milan for many years. He made friends with Federico Borromeo who became his protector. Some of his works are on display at the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana.



Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq, a Flemish ambassador, was incorrectly credited as the first European to have appreciated the beauty of the tulip based on letters he wrote during his stay at the Ottoman Court of Suleiman the Magnificent. But some studies show that the letters were actually written in March 1558, and not in the winter of 1554, therefore during his second trip. Although Busbecq sent bulbs from Istanbul, it is certain that it was in 1573, therefore it's wrong to attribute the presence in Europe of a special species of tulip to him. Ultimately, it seems that the first tulip to flower in Europe was in the garden of a councillor of Habsburg named Johann Heinrich Herwart, in Bavaria. Conrad Gesner, a Swiss natural scientist, visited Herwart's garden and described the flower in April of 1559, calling it *Tulipa Turcarum* (since it originated from the Ottoman Empire). The tulip began to spread. In 1562, a ship landed in the port of Antwerp and a merchant found the bulbs in his cargo. He ate some of them thinking that they were similar to onions, others he planted in his garden and showed them to a friend and businessman named Joris Rye, who knew Carolus Clusius, an outstanding and skilful botanist. It was 1563. The story of Clusius had its ups and downs but he was the only one to carefully study the tulips and classify them. The most popular were the *Rosen* (the most numerous, pink or red on a white background), the *Violetten* (purple or lilac on a white background) and the *Bizarden* (the favourite and existing in only two dozen species, they were red, crimson or brown on a yellow background). The favourites were the striped ones; ironically these colours were due to a disease that broke up the colour on the petals, i.e. the Tulip breaking virus. A record price was set for a *Semper Augustus* bulb, the most celebrated and most coveted tulip belonging to the *Rosen* category. It was so rare that few had the fortune to admire it and given the scarcity of the bulbs, it was impossible to trade. Signs that Tulpenmanie was beginning to spread came with the *Semper Augustus*. The rivals of *Semper Augustus* in terms of beauty and rarity were the *Viceroy* (*Violetten*) and *Root en Gheel van Leyde* (*Bizarden*). During the Golden Age, tulips were not very common and the most prized varieties were very scarce. They were so sought after and expensive that it became more profitable to cultivate them. As a result, these flowers become a symbol of prestige and the prices skyrocketed. Negotiations and sales took place in the home of the merchant Jacob van der Buerse or in inns and taverns, a common, albeit illegal practice, where children were often used as spies. A bulb could cost up to one thousand florins, an exorbitant price when compared to the average annual wage that at that time was about 150 florins.

Land, houses, livestock, carriages, wine or beer barrels, cheese, furniture, clothing, silverware, etc. could be traded for these flowers. By 1636, the tulip bulb became the fourth leading export product of the Netherlands, after gin, herring and cheese. On 5 February 1637, the first speculative bubble in history burst. The demand for tulips collapsed and prices plummeted, many bankrupt traders were forced to pay fines and many lost their jobs. Subsequently, all the contracts were declared void and a ceiling of 50 florins was fixed for the sale of a bulb. In this story of ambitious and conceited men, vanity, ostentatious, caducity and illusion speak for themselves.

#### Riferimenti particolari, curiosità, note:

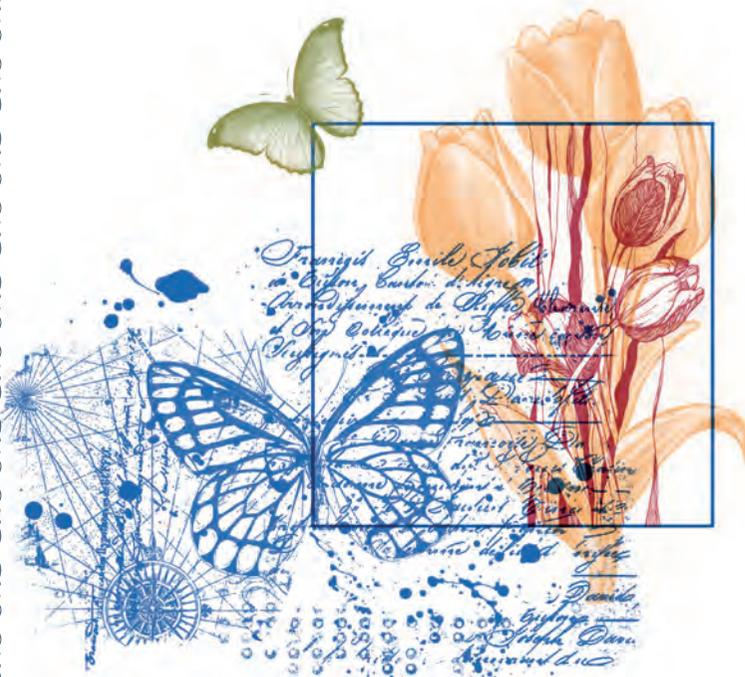
- The tulips present in the composition are the famous and coveted *Viceroy* and *Purper Int Wit Van Jeroen* varieties.
- The book on the right is "*Rariorum plantarum historia*" by Carolus Clusius.
- Books and illustrations used for the documentation:
  - Book of tulips, 1643, illustrated by Judith Leyster, Dutch painter and designer of the Golden Age, belonging to the school of Northern Holland.
  - *Verzameling van een meenigte tulipaenen, naar het leven geteekend met hunne naamen, en swaafte der bollen, zoo als die publicq verkogt zijn, te Haarlem in den jaare A. 1637, door P. Cos, bloemist te Haarlem* - Catalogue-manuscript by the Botanist P. Cos of Haarlem, dating back to the period of the tulip speculative bubble. It includes 75 illustrated sheets, complete with the names of the bulbs, weight and price in florins for which they were sold (added later, as was the title page).
  - Illustrations by Jacob Marrel and Alexander Marshal.

## TULPENMANIE

The Italian term of “*natura morta*” literally translated as “*dead nature*” is a somewhat unfortunate way of describing these paintings depicting inanimate subjects. The Dutch term is “*stilleven*” translated as “*still life*”. Considering that Van Eyck gave a jar and flower the same importance as a face, I like to think of these paintings as a moment stopped in time. The depiction of the immobility of the moment, albeit full of hidden meaning, is the glimpse of an action stopped in time but destined to continue.

This vase contains a real explosion of flowers, referring to plant life and with a small reference to the animal world given by a lepidopteran, the butterfly flying on the left. Various kinds of objects are placed haphazardly, almost by accident, on top of the table, covered by a delicate napkin that recalls the pink of some flowers. These objects are a representation of imperfection to give more naturalness to the view. An almost poetic, everyday embrace, full of suspense and mystery, where every detail of this composition recaptures the fundamental theme of the fleeting nature of beauty and, in a broader concept, of life; first by the flowers, then by the fruit, objects of luxury, ornaments, baubles and an overturned bottle of perfume. Luxury is as vain as the precariousness of a leaf or stone, that, though hard and resistant, is smoothed and corroded by water and time.

## EVERYTHING PASSES



### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- From the 15th century until the introduction of the euro, the currency used in the Netherlands was the Gulden (florin). The Stuiver was the currency used until the period of the Napoleonic wars and its relationship with the Gulden dated back to 1543 with the introduction of the silver Carolusgulden by Emperor Charles the Fifth. The Stuiver was worth 16 Penning or 8 Duits, while 20 Stuiver was worth 1 Gulden.
- The tulips in the vase are two varieties very sought after in the 17th century: the Root en Gheel van Leyde (red and yellow of Leida, the most common of the Bizarden series, i.e. the group featuring yellow or white stripes on a red, brown or purple background) and the buds of Lack Honsbeet.

## DE VLIEGENDE VOS

De vliegende vos is an inn in Delft and this is a table inside it, a scene with simple and common subjects.

Small daily actions that took place at the tables of the inn: the dried meat ready to be cut, the warm bread, the wine waiting to be poured into the mugs, the garlic ready to be rubbed on the bread and the gulden all set to pay the bill.

A cat, with its curiosity and stealthy attitude, starts to move and then interrupts, for an instant, the absorbed and collected moment of the lunch.

I wanted to use the cat as a symbol of individuality because it knew how to be tamed by man while retaining its strong identity. Its freedom conflicts with the fear and moral limitations imposed on it by society. Superior and disinterested in the symbols concealed in the objects depicted to its side, it does not care about the ultimate meaning, but only about how to grab the dried meat.



### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- De vliegende vos, the flying fox, was the name of the inn managed by the Vermeer family. The locale was on Voldersgracht in Delft, a respectable area of the city.
- The name of the inn probably came from the surname that Vermeer's father adopted around 1620, "Vos", which he later changed to Vermeer (Van der Meer = from the sea).
- The tiles in the background are Delft pottery with the characteristic blue and white colour.

I wanted to call this composition Xenia because it is a sumptuously laid table ready to welcome special guests.

The food, dishes, and flowers permeate wealth. That wealth so much sought after and so terribly dangerous, to the point that it leaves you feeling uncertain of your final judgement.

After such an opulent dinner, the need for charitable acts is fundamental to guarantee salvation of the soul. Sin and the fleeting nature of life are evidenced symbolically.

The precariousness of beauty and youth can be seen in the fruits and flowers, fresh one moment but destined to wither and perish.

The wealth of the family is demonstrated by the valuable crockery, fine foods, goblets, Römer glasses, silver pot for the game, and fabrics...

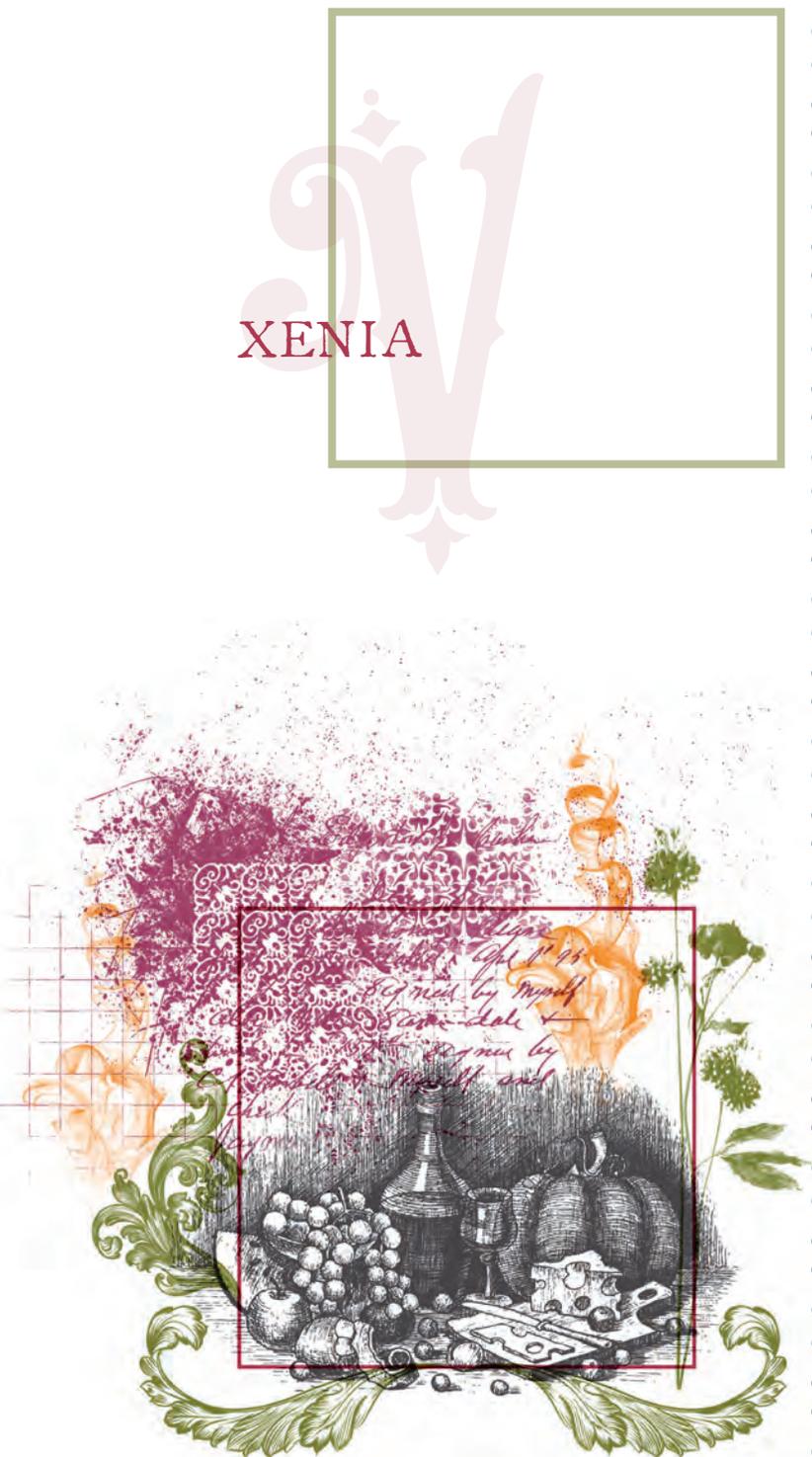
The pears evoke the co-existence between pleasure and death: in the symbolic economy they suggest the shape of the heart, they are the fruits of Venus, therefore linked to sweet pleasures.

The pumpkins remind us that fortune is transient, subtlety warning us of humana fragilitas. Even the glass, fragile and delicate like human life, with its reflections and reverberations teaches us about the flimsiness of illusions. Finally, the unlit candle, which produces a wisp of smoke that rises upwards to disappear, reminding us that the magic of the realest, most concrete and beautiful reality does not last.

#### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- Xenia's paintings were directly related to the concept of hospitality and adorned the rooms and pantries of Greek homes. They were gifts given to guests, decorative motifs that weren't of high artistic value.

XENIA



# GOEDE NACHT

A rich lady gets ready for the night. The corner of the home is adorned with fine fabrics and accessories. Fresh flowers and jewellery allude to the beauty and femininity of the person. Finely decorated porcelain, precious books and objects are testimony of the lady's wealth and prosperity. On the right is a watch that silently recalls the passage of time and, next to the mirror, it seems to want to remind the lady that the face she sees reflected in the mirror will one day be more tired and shrivelled. The sign of the inevitable final landing comes from the unlit candles positioned a little higher up. Wealth, money and affluence cannot postpone or change the final result in store for all of us. The smoke coming out of the bedwarmer envelops everything, it rises up and disperses becoming the strongest symbol of the entire scene.

## Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- A simple representation of reality was often not enough for clients. They wanted an almost perfect vision, distorted just enough to make their monotonous existence more exciting.



## DE CAFFAWERKER

The setting is located inside the home of a manufacturer of fine fabrics. In this particular corner, the man works, meets customers, exhibits his goods, allows them to be touched, and offers his guests ripe fruit, wine or beer.

He is a wealthy person who can afford unusual products, spices, perfumes, jewellery, ceramics and silverware, and he loves to show off his social status.

The eyes can roam and discover the various precious objects but, at both ends, the scene is closed by two brackets consisting of two dried roses and an unlit candle, clear symbols of vanity that bring the consciousness and spirit back to the uncomfortable feeling of immense and immoral opulence.

### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

- The Caffa is a damask fabric obtained from a complicated process of weaving silk threads with cotton or wool. Many manufacturers of this fabric (caffawerkers) came from the south of the Netherlands. The textile industry (Trijpfabriek) flourished in Haarlem in the 17th century. William III, King of England, personally visited some of these factories and purchased large quantities of fabrics. Subsequently, the English began to make a similar product, which of course was very detrimental to the manufacturers of Haarlem.



# HOMO BULLA EST

## MAN IS A BUBBLE

Life is like a breath, brief and fragile.

Objects like the glasses, bubbles and smoke are the most connected emblems because they come from a breath, while being precarious and transient.

The phrase warns the spectator of the brevity of human life, the vanity and infinite void of worldly things.

### Special references, interesting facts, notes:

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- I was inspired by the Vanitas and Still Life paintings of Evert (Edwaert) Collier.
- Writings were used by authors to emphasise the aspects of fragility and transience of life and worldliness. In this case, the meaning is: "Let no man be called happy before his death".

