Explore our selection of prints for sale
VISIT PRINTS SHOP
And now with *Free Shipping!*

1.1k Shares

COLLECTIONS / IMAGES

The Reverse of a Framed Painting, and Other Trompe L'oeil by Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts (ca. 1670)

Buy as a Print

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *The Reverse of a Framed Painting* (ca. 1670) — Source

On Easter Sunday 1669, the diarist Samuel Pepys was bowled over by the ability of the Dutch painter Simon Verelst (1644–1710),

> *who took us to his lodging close by, and did shew us a little flower-pot of his doing, the finest thing that ever, I think, I saw in my life; the drops of dew hanging on the leaves, so as I was forced, again and again, to put my finger to it, to feel whether my eyes were deceived or no. He do ask 70l. for it: I had the vanity to bid him 20l.; but a better picture I never saw in my whole life; and it is worth going twenty miles to see it.*

Around the time Pepys was poking the painting of Verelst, another northern European painter, Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, was also causing confusion with the brush, creating his masterpiece known as *The Reverse of a Framed Painting* (ca. 1670), an image that is, to modern eyes at least, his most striking.

Gijsbrechts was a master of trompe l'oeil, the technique of painting in which the painter tricks the viewer into perceiving that they are looking at an actual three-dimensional scene, rather than merely a representation of a three-dimensional scene on a flat plane. The name trompe l'oeil, or "deceive the eye", didn't come into use until Louis-Léopold Boilly showed a painting of this name at the Paris Salon of 1800, but the technique stretches back to antiquity. Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* gives a story of Zeuxis and Parrhasius in the fifth century BC competing as to who was the greater artist. Zeuxis' painting of grapes is so realistic that birds swoop down to peck at them, but when Zeuxis follows a request that he should pull back the curtain covering his painting, Parrhasius' superior skill is unveiled: the curtain itself is the painting, so cleverly rendered that it is indistinguishable from the real. Italian Quattrocento artists, with their interest in perspective, revived trompe l'oeil, and in the seventeenth century Dutch and Flemish artists built on their facility for still lives with further movement towards life-likeness. Gijsbrechts was among their number.

Born in Antwerp around 1625, Gijsbrechts criss-crossed northern Europe, eventually dying probably around 1675. He had a son, Franciscus Gijsbrechts, also a painter, with his wife Anna Moons, whom he married in 1648, although by 1659 he enlisted as a member of the Sodality of the Unmarried Men of Age. His biography at RKD, the Netherlands Institute for Art History, traces him from Regensburg, through Hamburg to Copenhagen, where he spent the period from 1668–1672 as a court painter, and where most of his remaining paintings can be found. Most of these, below, are from the collection of Denmark's Statens Museum for Kunst.

Gijsbrecht's trompe l'oeil paintings depict some traditional objects: an impressively luxurious breakfast spread, a letter rack, falconry equipment, or two dead birds. *A Cabinet in the Artist's Studio* includes within its selection of artist's items a portrait that seems to be of Gijsbrecht himself. But it's his *The Reverse of a Framed Painting* that is most unusual. SMK Curator Eva de la Fuente Pedersen explains:

> *When viewed from a distance we are genuinely fooled into believing that the artist has left a painting standing on the floor with its back turned outwards. As you approach the painting its deception is revealed. What appeared to be the back of a framed painting is actually the front of a canvas. The deception is evoked by means of shadows: the shadows cast by the decorative frame onto the stretcher; the shadows cast by the stretcher onto the back of the canvas, and the shadows cast by the small note and the nails. In order for the deception to fully work the painting should be placed so that its faux shadows are in keeping with the light sources available in the room in which it is placed.*

Pedersen supposes that the painting was shown, amidst other playfully deceptive works, in the King's Perspective Chamber which formed part of the Royal Danish Cabinet of Curiosities around 1700, when Gijsbrechts was in Copenhagen. More than 300 years later it continues to intrigue, striking us as a strangely modern work, in which we could see various prefigurings of later artistic movements. It partakes in, and simultaneously pokes fun at, figurative art. It hints at a fascination with the materiality of painting, the substance as the subject. There's also something about the use of rectilinear lines to show us the *reverse* of an image which, albeit accidentally, somehow foreshadows a very modern obsession with the non-representational image (the "non-image", if you will), as expressed so strikingly in Kasimir Malevich's Black Square (1915) and other subsequent abstract works of the twentieth century.

Text by Melissa McCarthy

SOURCE	Wikimedia Commons / National Gallery of Denmark	UNDERLYING WORK RIGHTS	PD Worldwide
More National Gallery of Denmark content on PDR (1)		DIGITAL COPY RIGHTS	No Additional Rights • Labelled CC0 license by source • We offer this info as guidance only
More Wikimedia Commons content on PDR (97)		DOWNLOAD	Right click on image or see source for higher res version

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Letter Rack and Music Book*, 1668 — Source

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Quodlibet with Violin, Pistol and Curtain*, 1664 — Source

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Letter Rack with an Hourglass, a Razor and Scissors*, ca. 1664 — Source

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Letter Rack with Christian V's Proclamation*, 1671 — Source

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Dead Duck and Hunting Implements*, ca. 1672 — Source

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Falconer's Bag and other Equipment for Falconry*, 1671 — Source

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Studio Wall and Vanitas Still Life*, 1668 — Source

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *An Open Cabinet of Curiosities with a Hercules Group*, 1670 — Source

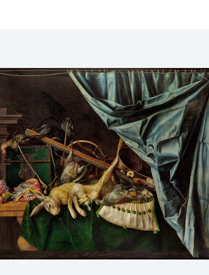
Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Breakfast Piece and Goblets*, 1672 — Source

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Pistols*, 1672 — Source

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Riding Whip and Letter Bag*, 1672 — Source

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Two Dead Birds Hanging on a Wall*, ca. 1672 — Source

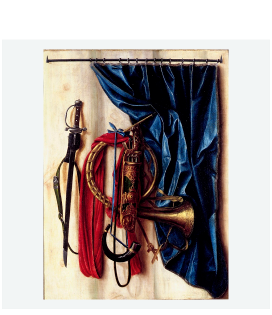
Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Letter Rack with a Barber-Surgeon's Instruments*, 1668 — Source



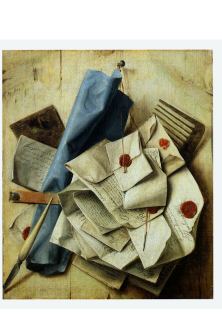
Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Violin, Painter's Instruments, and Self-Portrait*, 1675 — Source

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Studio Wall and Vanitas Still Life*, 1665 — Source

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Still life (trompe l'oeil)*, 1663 — Source



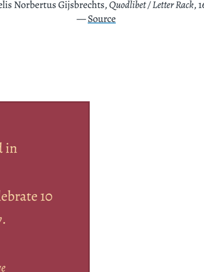
Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *After the Falcon Hunt*, 1671 — Source



Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *An Open Cupboard Door*, 1665 — Source

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *An Open Cabinet*, between 1666 and 1678 — Source

Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Curtain and Hunting Implements*, 1672 — Source



Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Quodlibet / Letter Rack*, 1675 — Source

Imagery from this post is featured in
AFFINITIES
our special book of images created to celebrate 10 years of *The Public Domain Review*.
500+ images – 368 pages
Large format – Hardcover with inset image
ORDER TODAY

Want this image on your wall?
We've the image from this post in our online prints shop—all custom made to the highest standards, framed or unframed, and shipped to your door.
Buy Print

PUBLISHED
Nov 5, 2020

MEDIUM Images THEME The Arts STYLE Paintings EPOCH 17th Century

RELATED COLLECTIONS

BOOKS / The Arts
Women Painters of the World: from the time of Caterina Vigri to Rosa Bonheur (1905)

IMAGES / The Arts
Highlights from Folger Shakespeare Library's Release of almost 80,000 Images

BOOKS / The Arts
What to Draw and How to Draw It (1913)

BOOKS / The Arts, Humour & Satire
Wit and Wisdom of Don Quixote (1867)

BOOKS / Design & Typography, The Arts
A Theory of Pure Design: Harmony, Balance, Rhythm (1907)

BOOKS / The Arts
John Locke's Method for Common-Place Books (1685)

IMAGES / Natural World, The Arts
***A Careful Selection of Whisk Ferns* (1837)**

IMAGES / Design & Typography, The Arts
Sheet Music Covers for the Gotham-Attucks Company, ca. 1905–1911

IF YOU LIKED THIS…

Become a Friend of the PDR
We rely on our annual donors to keep the project alive. Perks include receiving twice-a-year our very special themed postcard packs and getting 10% off our prints.
Find Out More

GET OUR NEWSLETTER
Our latest content, your inbox, every fortnight
Privacy Policy More Info
Name
Email
Subscribe

Prints for Your Walls
Explore our selection of fine art prints, all custom made to the highest standards, framed or unframed, and shipped to your door.
START EXPLORING

Like many sites, we use cookies — small text files placed on your device used to gather info about how the site is being used and provide basic functionality (such as the shopping cart). This use is minimal and doesn't identify you as an individual. You can set your browser to not accept cookies, however, be aware that some key aspects of our site may not function as a result. More Info

Accept and Close