The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were a time of great intellectual and artistic activity in Europe, a period marked by the rise of the European Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution. In this context, the still-life genre flourished, with artists exploring various aspects of the natural world and the human condition through the小心翼翼placement of objects in three-dimensional space. One of the most prominent still-life painters of the time was Jacob Fopsen van Es, whose works continue to captivate art lovers today.

Van Es was born into a family of Dutch artists, and he received his earliest training from his father, Jacob van Es Senior. He was a gifted painter who specialized in still-life and genre painting, and his works are characterized by their naturalism, sharp lighting, and attention to detail. In his still-life paintings, van Es often depicted everyday objects such as fruit, flowers, and food, arranged in a manner that reflected the cultural and social values of the time.

Van Es continued to paint clearly lit and separate forms on the basis of material, form, color, and luster, were carefully arranged to suggest and invite consumption. Although larger than many of his other works, Still Life with Bread and Wine is a typical example of van Es's style. He often painted clearly lit and separate forms spread evenly across an inclined plane, where each object occupies its own space and casts its own shadow. The repetition of some shapes, found in the rounded edges of the foreshortened plates and cracked crockery, combined with a harmonious color scheme seen in the yellowish substance of the buttered rolls, the bread, and cheese, presents both unity and compositional balance.

Van Es, like his contemporaries, sometimes incorporated symbols derived from earlier religious paintings. Although it is difficult to be certain if this is the case in Still Life with Bread and Wine, Van Es was one of several Flemish artists working in this area in the late sixteenth century, where objects are separated into distinct entities with little or no emotional connection. Over the course of the century, more elaborate banquet scenes flourished, but still-life painting has quietly replaced the elite style. Thus, van Es's work, which shows little evidence of stylistic shifts, is often classified as contemporaneous. While some still-life paintings of the Baroque period, such as those by Abraham van Beyeren or Paulus Potter, were characterized by their dramatic contrasts of light and dark, van Es's work is more subdued and understated.

Still Life is an example of a "breakfast piece," a type of still-life painting that Van Es depicted. Known as a "breakfast piece," these works were full of representations of food and meals, eating and drinking-related objects arranged on a table top. The table usually extended across the entire width of the picture, often containing two, three, or four objects. The background is generally kept neutral, drawing the viewer's focus to the objects on the table. The variety of objects depicted, whether small rolls or loaves. Although heavy rye bread was a popular staple in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century, van Es continued to paint clearly lit and separate forms, an artistic approach that was typical of Dutch still-life painting.

Van Es's work demonstrates his virtuosity as an artist, attracting the attention of wealthy local patrons. His still-life paintings, which were godfathers to his children, indicated his elevated status and success. Although it was difficult to be certain if this is the case in Still Life with Bread and Wine, it is notable that van Es was one of several Flemish artists working in this area in the late sixteenth century, where objects are separated into distinct entities with little or no emotional connection. Over the course of the century, more elaborate banquet scenes flourished, but still-life painting has quietly replaced the elite style. Thus, van Es's work, which shows little evidence of stylistic shifts, is often classified as contemporaneous. While some still-life paintings of the Baroque period, such as those by Abraham van Beyeren or Paulus Potter, were characterized by their dramatic contrasts of light and dark, van Es's work is more subdued and understated.

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JACOB FOPSEN VAN ES
Flemish, c. 1596–1666

STILL LIFE
1630, oil on wood panel, 29 3/4 x 42 in.

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