

BRUEGEL

AND HIS TIME

Exhibition Facts

Duration	14. February – 24. May 2023
Venue	Tietze Gallery ALBERTINA
Curator	Laura Ritter Serena Ligas (assistant)
Works	ca. 90
Catalogue	available (in German) for EUR 32,90 onsite at the Museum Shop, as well as via www.albertina.at
Contact	Albertinaplatz 1 1010 Vienna T +43 (0)1 534 83 0 info@albertina.at www.albertina.at
Opening Hours	Daily 10 am – 6 pm
Press contact	Daniel Benyes T +43 (0)1 534 83 511 M +43 (0)699 12178720 d.benyes@albertina.at Nina Eisterer T +43 (0) 1 534 83 512 M +43 (0)699 10981743 n.eisterer@albertina.at

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Bruegel and His Time

14 February – 24 May 2023

In the exhibition *Bruegel and His Time*, the ALBERTINA Museum presents a selection of around 90 works from its own collection that illustrate the incomparable blossoming of the art of drawing in the 16th-century Netherlands. Alongside famous masterpieces by Jan de Beer, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, and Hendrick Goltzius, the selection also reveals works to the public that have recently been studied for the first time and, in some cases, restored. This presentation demonstrates the central role of drawing as an independent medium in the early modern period—and indeed, virtually no other era of European history witnessed the creation of such an astounding diversity of drawn art as did the Netherlands during those years.

At the forefront is Pieter Bruegel, whose work as his guild's most outstanding member left its mark on the production of art in the Low Countries, for many decades. His multifaceted graphic output, filled with humor and irony, tells of the deep-reaching changes that occurred during the century between the ending of the Middle Ages and the dawn of the baroque. In this, Bruegel exemplifies a whole range of artists whose drawings forged new paths and fundamentally reshaped the arts in the Netherlands. His name and his oeuvre serve as anchors in this presentation.

AN ALL-DRAWING EXHIBITION

It was with the utmost degree of technical virtuosity and extraordinary inventiveness that artists of the early modern period rendered their depictions of a radically changing world. Before the backdrop of the Reformation and the turmoil of the Eighty Years' War, centuries-old truths became increasingly subject to question. In connection with this, the ways in which reality was artistically reflected on paper likewise changed. The 16th-century saw drawing

liberate itself from the constraints imposed by the subordinate role of preliminary cartoons, studies, or sketches. For the first time, it became an autonomous means of artistic expression: the picture on paper. Alongside works in age-old genres such as devotional images and depictions of royals, a multiplicity of hitherto unseen topics appear—such as critical moral satires, sweeping landscapes, and finely drawn civic portraits. This new subject matter was depicted in sensitively executed chiaroscuro drawings, in colored chalk or with pen and ink.

The exhibition's highlights include the famous *Tree Man* by Hieronymus Bosch, one of the first independent drawings in the Netherlands; Pieter Bruegel's depiction of *Sloth*—populated by devilish hybrid creatures and demons—from the series *The Seven Deadly Sins*; and as a contrast the charming portraits and nuanced pen-and-ink artworks by artists such as Hendrick Goltzius and Jacob Matham, which demonstrate the enormous diversity of graphic tools. For the first time following extensive conservatorial treatment, this exhibition will present the masterpiece of Antwerp's Jan de Beer: designs for a stained-glass window originally over four meters in height showing the Christian motif of the *Tree of Jesse* and hence Jesus's royal descent as a member of the Davidic line.

THE COLLECTION OF THE ALBERTINA MUSEUM

The ALBERTINA Museum has its founder, Duke Albert of Saxe-Teschen, along with his wife Archduchess Marie Christine of Austria to thank for these magnificent masterpieces in exceptionally high quality. Duke Albert served as Governor of the Habsburg Netherlands beginning in 1780; he and his wife resided in Brussels, where they enjoyed immediate access to the flourishing local art market. The Duke went on to expand his holdings by the rich collections of the contemporary connoisseurs Charles Antoine Prince de Ligne of Brussels, Gottfried Winckler of Leipzig, and Cornelis Ploos van Amstel of Amsterdam, thereby acquiring three of his era's most important graphic collections. Later on, in 1796, he accomplished a highly profitable exchange of works with the Imperial Court Library—acquiring further major drawings by Netherlandish masters. By around 1800, Duke Albert

already possessed those approximately 3,500 master drawings from the Netherlands that form the core of the ALBERTINA Museum's rich holdings to this day. Therefore, our collection—together with that of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam—can boast the world's most important holdings of drawn art from the Netherlands.

The ALBERTINA Museum presented a slightly modified version of this exhibition at the Cleveland Museum of Art last year. It will now go on exhibit in Vienna beginning in mid-February.

We extend our thanks to the Flemish Government for its generous support of this project.

Exhibition Texts

BRUEGEL AND HIS TIME

Pieter Bruegel the Elder lives in an age of new artistic diversity. His oeuvre is marked by a vast array of motifs: besides the well-known depictions of peasant life, it includes broad landscapes, mysterious diableries and socially critical satires. Bruegel thus represents a range of Netherlandish artists such as Hieronymus Bosch, Jan de Beer, Maarten van Heemskerck or Hendrick Goltzius, who radically innovate established pictorial conventions in the 16th century. While religious themes and portraits have long determined artistic production, the dawn of the early Modern Era introduces an abundance of motifs.

Showing extraordinary inventiveness and technical brilliance, the artists of this period create images of a rapidly changing world. The rise of the middle class, the Reformation or the conflict with Spanish Habsburg rule lead to a fundamental reevaluation of societal norms. Controversial political and social questions are also discussed in the art works of the time. Given the changing political situation, many important masters such as Hans Bol, Jacques de Gheyn II or Roelant Savery shift their place of work several times during their career: they move from southern Netherlandish cities to the northern centers, go to Italy like Jan van der Straet, or travel extensively through Europe like Joris Hoefnagel. Despite the division into north and south formalized in 1579, the Netherlands thus remain a vibrant cultural region, marked by exchange and dynamism.

Drawing in particular finds a wide range of applications in these years, whether in cartoons for the windows of mighty cathedrals and private residences or in designs for precious luxury objects, paintings, and prints. At the same time, drawings attract new attention as collector's items among the educated elite. The exhibition presents some 90 works from the Albertina's rich holdings, illustrating the broad scope of drawing in 16th century Netherlands. The selected sheets highlight the impressive originality of Bruegel and his contemporaries, offering an opportunity to explore this colorful epoch in European art.

IMAGES IN LIGHT AND DARK

Around 1500, Antwerp develops into an international trading hub. The city becomes one of the most populous metropolises of its time, quickly establishing itself as a center of the arts. The local painter's guild regulates its members' output, their works being in high demand beyond the borders of the Netherlands.

In this period, so-called chiaroscuro drawings experience a heyday: a colored ground or a paper dyed with pigments forms the mid-tone between the lighter and darker lines of the depiction. These works are popular as model sheets, copies of older compositions or proof of artistic skill. Besides renowned masters such as Jan de Beer, various anonymous Antwerp Mannerists stand out in this field. Their pictures are characterized by fantastic architecture, as well as elongated figures with exalted gestures and lavish robes. A few years later, the Master of the Liechtenstein Cabinet experiments with the technique. Moreover, drawings on colored grounds are frequently employed as models for stained-glass due to their subtle effects of light and contrast. Such window designs range from monumental cartoons to small-format sheets. Through fine washes, such as those used by Dirck Vellert, they become works of art in their own right.

THE STAGING OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Various motifs from everyday life are elevated in the 16th century to subjects deemed worthy of representation and enjoy great popularity on the art market. The contemporary artist and historiographer Karel van Mander makes a distinction between creations "from the imagination" and depictions "from life". He thus differentiates between pictures put together by the artist from memory, and those created immediately in the moment of seeing. Highly elaborate compositions, such as Pieter Bruegel's *Spring* or the procession of the *Epileptics of Molenbeek*, apparently show scenes from real-life experience. In fact, however, they combine the observed with the invented. Other works such as Roelant Savery's studies, which are

provided with detailed color notes, or Jacques de Gheyn's *Seated Woman with Her Child* are first sketched in the spontaneous medium of black chalk or charcoal and are most likely created right in front of the living model.

Trading and market scenes emerge as a distinct genre, too. Besides the rendering of observed reality, such depictions frequently have a moralizing undertone: they take up such fundamental questions as the adequate way of handling money and property, a central concern in the burgher milieu of the time.

COSTUMES, GARBS, UNIFORMS

Costumes of all kinds are an important theme of drawing in the Netherlands. In courtly celebrations or triumphal entries of rulers and regents splendid robes and attributes serve the demonstration of power. The artists of the time fulfil their noble clientele's desire for grandeur with imaginative designs. In military contexts, the depiction of uniforms and ceremonial weapons is an essential task for draftsmen. The sources used for these sheets are frequently the costume books widespread in the 16th century, which describe the fashion of various social ranks, regions and epochs. For the theater of the day, costume studies are likewise an important resource. The so-called Chambers of Rhetoric, for example, informal societies of various occupational groups dedicated to the production of literary texts, organize processions and performances several times a year. The richly costumed figures of their allegorical productions are based on drawn models and are in turn documented in the medium of drawing. Depending on their context of creation, the preserved sheets range from rapid pen sketches such as Jacob Matham's *Man in Fantastic Costume* to the impressively detailed courtly costumes of Lucas van Valckenborch, which also can be seen as autonomous works of art.

OF MONSTERS AND HYBRID CREATURES

Images of monstrous hybrid creatures enjoy great popularity in the Netherlands throughout the 16th century. Drawing on the formal vocabulary of medieval book illumination and cathedral sculpture, Hieronymus Bosch popularizes the genre at the dawn of the early Modern Era. While spontaneous sketches allow a sense of his artistic work process, the master, active in Brabant, creates in the so-called Tree Man one of the earliest autonomous drawings of Netherlandish art. Bosch's works rapidly become collector's items appreciated beyond the country's borders, and his oeuvre is widely received already during his lifetime. Many of these diableries have a moralizing content and often feature comical undertones, fascinating the viewer with their strange devilry. Besides numerous anonymous masters, artists such as Pieter Bruegel or Jacques de Gheyn borrow from Bosch's inventions, adapting hybrid creatures and infernal landscapes for their own pictorial purposes. Related themes such as Christ's Descent into Limbo, the Last Judgement or the Seven Deadly Sins offer the opportunity for conjuring up ever new, fantastic compositions, so sought-after on the art market.

HISTORY AND PRESENT

The Netherlandish struggle for independence against the Habsburg Catholic reign of King Philip II of Spain in the 16th century is closely linked with questions of faith. It is crucial, too, for the art production of the day. In the urban centers, Lutheran or Calvinist movements take root and connect socio-political concerns with efforts at theological renewal. Latest from 1566, open conflict breaks out between adherents of the old and the new faith. The conviction of reformers that depictions of Christ, Mary and the Saints always harbor the threat of idolatry triggers devastating iconoclastic riots. Countless religious artworks in churches and monasteries throughout the land are destroyed. To address these conflicts as visual themes without falling victim to the strict censorship of the Spanish authorities, artists draw on

biblical or mythological events, establishing a link to the present. Through the timelessness of their historical contents, these works strike a chord with adherents of both religious persuasions.

Various Netherlandish masters also show great interest in the forms of antiquity and the Italian Renaissance: Maarten van Heemskerck and Maerten de Vos travel to Rome, while Jan van der Straet spends a major part of his career in Florence.

PENWORKS AND PORTRAITS

In so-called penworks, a specifically Netherlandish drawing technique that emerges in the late 16th century, the line work of engraving is imitated through swelling and thinning lines, parallel strokes and dense cross-hatching. Often executed on parchment, allowing for no corrections to be made, these works demand complete control over the pen and serve to showcase artistic virtuosity. Prominent collectors of such sheets include Emperor Rudolf II. Active in Haarlem, Hendrick Goltzius and his stepson and student Jacob Matham, as well as Jacques de Gheyn create large-format masterpieces of drawing in a wide range of themes. In the southern Netherlands, Johannes Wierix and his circle bring the penwork to absolute perfection, using the smallest formats. The proud artist portraits of the period demonstrate the status of these masters, who self-assuredly set themselves apart from mere craftsmen, presenting themselves as educated burghers. Although the portrait is no longer the exclusive preserve of the highest social classes, the representation of rulers still remains a central task of portraiture.

A VIEW OF THE WORLD

In the second half of the 16th century, landscape art becomes established as a distinct genre of drawing. Set against a worldview increasingly shaped by the observation of nature, expansive mountainous panoramas and detailed village or city views gain in popularity throughout Europe as typically Netherlandish products. Richly illustrated publications describe the geographical, historical and cultural features of certain cities and regions. Artists such as Joris Hoefnagel, in close contact with cosmographers and publishers, travel far and wide and create elaborate designs for printed compendia. In contrast, Jan van Stinemolen's *Panorama of Naples* impresses with its monumental format and detailed execution, documenting the independent status of drawing in these years. Hans Bol and his student Jacob Savery have a great impact on the depiction of city views, too: as sought-after masterpieces their works stand balanced between topographical precision and aesthetic construction. The landscapes of late Mannerism are typically executed in a brownblue color scheme. Created by the circle of Gillis van Coninxloo as well as Tobias Verhaecht, Jan Brueghel or David Vinckboons, they depict idealized mountain valleys and close-up views of forest interiors, enlivened by narrative figure scenes or emptied of any human presence. Motifs borrowed from reality are thus skillfully interwoven with stylized forms.

NORTHERN MANNERISM

In 1579 a process of formal political division begins, splitting the Netherlands into a Reformed north and a Catholic south ruled by Spain. The recapture of Antwerp, meanwhile Protestant, by the Spanish Habsburgs brings a phase of recession in the southern Netherlands, along with a marked fall in population and rise in emigration to the north. There, Cornelis Corneliszoon van Haarlem or Abraham Bloemaert, working in Utrecht, create dynamic compositional and figure studies, which, in their Italianate muscular physicality, twisted poses and bold foreshortenings draw on a late Mannerist ideal. Impulses also come from the

historiographer and artist Karel van Mander, who, after travels throughout Europe, leaves his Flemish homeland to settle in Haarlem. Joachim Antoniszoon Wtewael's designs for a cycle of stained-glass windows in the city hall of Woerden relate directly to the political events of the period, allegorically describing the struggle between the personified Netherlands and the Habsburg occupation. With their nuanced washes, elaborate lighting and richly-contrasting chiaroscuro effects, Wtewael's works are outstanding examples of the technical finesse of northern Mannerism.

Press images

The following images are available free of charge in the Press section of www.albertina.at:



Hieronymus Bosch
The Tree Man, ca. 1500 -1510
 28 x 22 cm
 Pen and ink, on paper
 The Albertina Museum, Vienna



Jan de Beer
The Marriage of the Virgin, ca. 1515–1520
 29 x 25 cm
 Brush in gray and white, on gray prepared paper
 The Albertina Museum, Vienna



Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Christ in Limbo, 1561
 23 x 30 cm
 Pen and brown ink, on paper
 The Albertina Museum, Vienna



Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Spring, 1565
 22 x 29 cm
 Pen and brown ink, on paper
 The Albertina Museum, Vienna



Peter de Witte the Elder (attr.)
Portrait of Anna of Austria, 1568–1570
 39 x 23 cm
 Black and white chalk, on paper
 The Albertina Museum, Vienna



Pieter Bruegel the Elder
The Painter and the Buyer, ca. 1566
 26 x 22 cm
 Feder in brown, on paper
 The Albertina Museum, Vienna



Hendrick Goltzius
Self-Portrait, ca. 1593–1595
 43 x 33 cm
 Black and colored chalks, watercolor, brush in
 gray and white, on paper
 The Albertina Museum, Vienna



Jacob Savery I
Winter Landscape near Amsterdam,
 ca. 1600–1603
 40 x 55 cm
 Pen and brown ink, watercolor, gouache,
 on paper
 The Albertina Museum, Vienna