

Pieter Bruegel

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A second Hieronymus Bosch,
Who retraced the vivid images of his
master,
Whose masterful brush rendered his style
with fidelity,
And in doing so, perhaps surpassed him?
You elevate yourself, Pieter, when through
your fecund art,
In the style of your old master you draw
pleasant things
Made to amuse; with him, you merit
The praise of the greatest artists.

- Dominicus Lampsonius

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Joannes and Lucas van Doetecum (after **Pieter Bruegel the Elder**)
Magdalena Poenitens

c. 1553-1556
Etching for the series *Large Landscapes*,
32.3 x 43 cm
British Museum, London

Biography

1525: The exact year of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's birth is unknown; it is likely to have been between 1525 and 1530. The whereabouts of his birthplace are just as uncertain, although it was probably Breda, in the province of North Brabant.

1545-1550: Until 1550, Bruegel is thought to have been an apprentice under Pieter Coecke van Aelst in Antwerp.

1550: Bruegel assists with a triptych (whereabouts unknown) commissioned by the Mechlin Glovemakers Guild.

1551: "Peeter Brueghels" is registered as a master with the Antwerp artists' guild, the Guild of Saint Luke.

1552: He travels to Italy, passing through Lyon on the way and returning across the Swiss Alps. In Rome, he is believed to have worked with the miniaturist Ginlio Clovio.

1556: He works at the workshop of Hieronymus Cock in Antwerp, making designs for engravings. *Big Fish Eat Little Fish* and *The Ass in the School* are two of his prints copied as engravings in this year.

1557: Series of seven engravings entitled *The Seven Deadly Sins*.

1559: He follows this with a series of seven engravings with the Virtues. Bruegel paints *The Fight between Carnival and Lent*.

1562: He paints, amongst other works, *The Fall of Rebel Angels* and *The Suicide of Saul*. He probably travels to Amsterdam before settling in Brussels.

1563: He marries Mayken Coecke, the daughter of his old master Pieter Coecke.

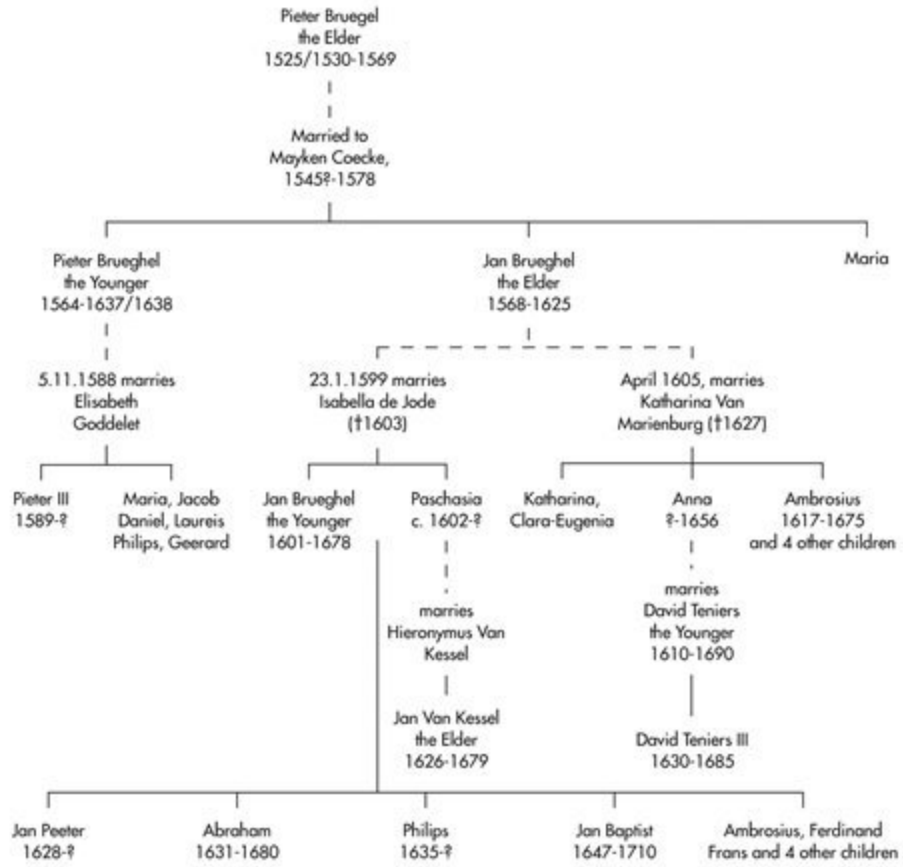
1564: Birth of his first son, Pieter Brueghel the Younger, (later known as "Hell" Brueghel).

1565: Completion of a series of paintings depicting the months or seasons.

1568: Birth of his second son, Jan Brueghel the Elder (later known as "Velvet" Brueghel). In this year, Bruegel paints *The Magpie on the Gibbet*, *The Beggars*, and *The Tempest*.

1569: He probably died on 5 September; he is buried in the Church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Chapelle in Brussels.

BAVEGEL





Introduction

There is hardly a master whose works and life are more interesting than those of Pieter Bruegel. The first in a long line of painters, he was the founder of one of many Flemish families in which artistic talent seems to have been hereditary, for instance, the Van Eycks, the Matsys, the Van Orleys, the Pourbus, the Van Cleves, the Coxies, the Keys, the De Vos, and, later, the Teniers.



The Fall of Icarus

c. 1555-1560

Oil on canvas, 73.5 x 112 cm
Königliche Museen der Schönen
Künste, Brussels





Having his roots in a line of old Flemish stock, this singular and original artist and thinker drew all of his energy from his native soil and produced a vigorous family tree that sprouted in many directions.



Big Fish Eat Little Fish

1556

Pen and ink drawing in grey and
black ink, 21.6 x 30.7 cm
Graphische Sammlung, Albertina,
Vienna





One example was his equally renowned son Jan, who is well known by his epithet 'Velvet Brueghel', a painter whose exceptional talent contrasted strikingly with that of his father. Through the work of these two markedly different masters, we have the opportunity to follow the different phases of Flemish art during a period when its constitution and aims were undergoing profound change.



The Ass in the School

1556

Pen and Indian ink, 23.2 x 30.2 cm
Staatliche Museen,
Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin





The Century of Pieter Bruegel the Elder

Bruegel's work constitutes a definitive illustration for the most scholarly of historical treatises of this period. He succeeded in capturing the souls of his models in his figure of a dancing peasant or at a delicious feast with a few figures seated around a table. Even in their paintings of gentle fire-lit interiors, the old masters always included a window that opened onto the landscape that showed details of contemporary daily life.



Pride from the series Seven
Deadly Sins

1557

Pen and brown ink, 22.9 x 30 cm
Institut néerlandais,
Fondation Custodia,
F. Lugt Collection, Paris





Pieter Bruegel brought these tiny realist compositions to the foreground, designing them to bring the viewer's sentiment closer to the already poignant scenes of Christ's Passion. This became the subject upon which Bruegel, with his jolly and satirical Flemish verve, exerted his keen sense of observation, and his marvellous gift for capturing the burlesque or tragic nature of the masses.



Elck or Everyman

1558

Pen and brown ink, 21 x 29.3 cm
British Museum, London





When considered from another point of view, it is tempting to define Bruegel, as Van Mander does, as a painter of the peasantry, for it is true that he produced a great number of pastoral scenes. In particular, Bruegel studied the morals of rural life and seems to have been attracted to his subjects through a secret sympathy and certain affinity for their thinking and sentiments which were born out of his own common origins.



The Alchemist

1558

Pen and brown ink, 30.8 x 45.3 cm
Staatliche Museen,
Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin





This connection withstood his stays in large cities, his contact with elite circles of scholars and artists, and his encounters with Italian landscapes and masterpieces. None of this would come to change Bruegel's powerful originality, as it resisted influence like a diamond resists the marks of other stones.



The Last Judgement

1558

Pen and brown ink, 23 x 30 cm
Graphische Sammlung, Albertina,
Vienna





Although Bruegel found lasting pleasure in the portrayal of the lives of the peasantry, it is not a sufficient reason to reduce this illustrator of life to the specialised label of genre painter. His characters, be they rustic or bourgeois, must be seen in the light of the appetites, ulterior motives, material needs, and moral aspirations that were reflections of their time.



Twelve Flemish Proverbs

1558

Tempera on oak, 74.5 x 98.4 cm
Museum Mayer van den Bergh,
Antwerp



EEN MAN DIE EEN KIND OP ZIJN RUG
DRAAGT, EN EEN ANDER DIE EEN
KIND OP ZIJN RUG DRAAGT.



EEN MAN DIE EEN GROOT ZWART
KLEED HEEFT, EN EEN ANDER
DIE EEN GROOT ZWART KLEED
HEEFT.



EEN VROU DIE EEN BASKET
DRAAGT, EN EEN ANDER
DIE EEN BASKET DRAAGT.



EEN MAN DIE OP EEN STOEL
ZIT, EN EEN ANDER DIE OP
EEN STOEL ZIT.



EEN MAN DIE IN DE GROND
GRAAF, EN EEN ANDER
DIE IN DE GROND GRAAF.



EEN MAN DIE EEN BASKET
MET BLOEMEN DRAAGT, EN
EEN ANDER DIE EEN BASKET
MET BLOEMEN DRAAGT.



EEN MAN DIE EEN STAF
HEEFT, EN EEN ANDER
DIE EEN STAF HEEFT.



EEN MAN DIE EEN BASKET
DRAAGT, EN EEN ANDER
DIE EEN BASKET DRAAGT.



EEN MAN DIE EEN GROOT
BUNDEL DRAAGT, EN EEN
ANDER DIE EEN GROOT
BUNDEL DRAAGT.



EEN MAN DIE EEN GROOT
BUNDEL DRAAGT, EN EEN
ANDER DIE EEN GROOT
BUNDEL DRAAGT.



EEN MAN DIE EEN GROOT
BUNDEL DRAAGT, EN EEN
ANDER DIE EEN GROOT
BUNDEL DRAAGT.



EEN MAN DIE EEN GROOT
BUNDEL DRAAGT, EN EEN
ANDER DIE EEN GROOT
BUNDEL DRAAGT.