PRESS FILE

Tine Luk Meganck

Pieter Bruegel the Elder

Fall of the Rebel Angels

Art, Knowledge and Politics on the Eve of the Dutch Revolt

Silvana Editoriale

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Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Fall of the Rebel Angels*

Art, Knowledge and Politics on the Eve of the Dutch Revolt

**Technical sheet**

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**Synopsis of the publication**

*Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Fall of the Rebel Angels* 
Art, Knowledge and Politics on the Eve of the Dutch Revolt

*Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Fall of the Rebel Angels* is the first comprehensive book on one of the most cherished masterpieces of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels. It argues that with his *Fall of the Rebel Angels* (1562) Pieter Bruegel (died 1569) turned a traditional devotional theme into an innovative commentary on his own time, and situates the painting within the early modern cultures of knowledge and collecting. More particularly, it exposes that many of the hybrid falling angels are carefully composed of *naturalia* and *artificialia*, as they were collected in art and curiosity cabinets of the time. Bruegel's much noted emulation of Hieronymus Bosch was thus only part of his wider interest in collecting, inspecting, and imitating the artistic and natural world around him. This prompts an examination of the world at the time that Bruegel painted the Fall of the Rebel Angels: locally, in the urban and courtly centres of Antwerp and Brussels on the eve of the Dutch revolt, and globally, as the discovery of the New World irreversibly transformed the European perception of art and nature. Painted as a tale of hubris and pride, Bruegel's masterpiece becomes a meditation on the potential and danger of man's pursuit of art, knowledge and politics, a universal theme that has lost nothing of its power today.
Spreads

Fig. 36

Fig. 37

Fig. 38

Fig. 39

Royal Museums
of Fine Arts of Belgium

Fig. 36 and an example was also displayed in the Museum of Fine Arts of the University of London. For the partially imaginary and at any rate philosophical studies of paintings with Albrecht Dürer and Lucas Cranach by Hans Blumenhofer in 1738, we also refer to the rich collection of Dutch art in the Prado. Albrecht Dürer's Nasturtiums also contained an illustration of a goldfish. A unique example of a goldfish, however, comes from the collection of the Prado. The goldfish was formerly exhibited in the Museo del Prado the Museum of Fine Arts of Brussels.
On the author

Tine L. Meganck is a researcher at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels, funded by the Interuniversity Attraction Pole (IAP) City and Society in the Low Countries, a research program of the Belgian Science Policy (2007-2011; 2012-2017). Her major research interests are early modern art, art theory and cultural history in the Low Countries in a global perspective, and in particular interactions between early modern artists, antiquarian, humanists, naturalists. She received her PhD in Art History from Princeton University, Princeton, NJ (USA) in 2003 with a dissertation “Erudite Eyes: Artists and Antiquarians in the Circle of Abraham Ortelius (1527-1598).” From 2005-2007 she held a Return Grant of the Federal Science Policy of Belgium. This enabled her to study the occult notions in the art theoretical notebook of Peter Paul Rubens (1570-1640) and to contribute to the exhibition Rubens. A Genius at Work, RMFAB, Brussels, 14.09.2007-27.01.2008.

Biography of Pieter Bruegel the Elder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c. 1545-1550</td>
<td>Probably apprenticed to Pieter Coecke van Aelst (workshop in Antwerp, then Brussels); probably trained as a manuscript illuminator by Coecke’s wife, Mayken Verhulst.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1551-1552</td>
<td>Working with Pieter Baltens on the wings of a now-lost altarpiece for St Rombout’s Cathedral in Mechelen ordered by the local Glovers’ Guild. The commission is subcontracted to them by the painter and art dealer Clause Dorisi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1552</td>
<td>Probably first professional contacts with the print publisher Hieronymus Cock. Earliest surviving dated drawings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1552-1554</td>
<td>Journey to Italy, probably via Lyon, perhaps in the company of the painter Maarten de Vos and the sculptor Jacob Jongelinck.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1553-1554</td>
<td>In Rome; close contacts with the illuminator Giulio Clovio; travels further to the south (Reggio Calabria).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1554</td>
<td>Returns to the Low Countries, probably via Venice and the Alps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1554-1562 ?</td>
<td>Most likely living in Antwerp, working predominantly as a print designer for Hieronymus Cock’s publishing house ‘Aux Quatre Vents/In de Vier Winden’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1557</td>
<td>Earliest surviving dated painting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1560</td>
<td>Makes his only surviving etching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1561-1562</td>
<td>Increasingly turns to painting, possibly encouraged by Nicolaes Jongelinck, no doubt Bruegel’s most important patron as well as the major collector of his work during the artist’s lifetime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1562 ?</td>
<td>Moves to Brussels.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Marries Mayken Coecke, daughter of Pieter Coecke and Mayken Verhulst in Brussels’ Notre-Dame de la Chapelle Church.

Focuses all but exclusively on painting, working for such patrons as the geographer and humanist scholar Abraham Ortelius, the Antwerp Mint Master Jean Noirot and Cardinal Antoine Perennot de Granvelle, Archbishop of Mechelen.

Birth of his son Pieter – Pieter Brueghel the Younger.

Praised by Lodovico Giucciardini in his description of the Low Countries, Descrittione di Tutti i Paesi Bassi.


Produces his last known surviving paintings and drawings.

Commissioned by the brussels authorities to paint the excavation of the canal from Brussels to Antwerp (inaugurated in 1575).

Dies in Brussels and is buried in Notre-Dame de la Chapelle.


Bruegel at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium

Pieter Bruegel the Elder is one of the most famous Renaissance painters. Only about forty of his paintings from his short career (he died in 1569, around the age of 40) have been preserved, making them rare and extremely valuable. It is perhaps little known that the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium house the second largest ensemble of Bruegel the Elder paintings, after the exceptional collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. The RMFAB own several of his paintings: the Fall of the Rebel Angels (1562), the Winter Landscape with a Bird Trap (1565), and the Census at Bethlehem (1566), as well as one preparatory drawing for Prudence (1558). The three paintings are visible for the public, at the Musée OldMasters Museum.
Pieter I Bruegel, *Fall of the Rebel Angels*, 1562, oak. RMFAB, Brussels, inv. 584
© RMFAB, photo: Grafisch Buro Lefevre, Heule

Pieter I Bruegel, *Winter Landscape with a Bird Trap*, 1565, oak. RMFAB, Brussels, inv. 8724 © RMFAB, photo: J. Geleyns / Ro scan
Pieter I Bruegel, *Census at Bethlehem*, 1566, oak. RMFAB, Brussels, inv. 3637
© RMFAB, photo: J. Geleyns / Ro scan

Pieter I Bruegel, *Prudence*, 1559, paper, pen with brown ink. RMFAB, Brussels, inv. 4060 / 490
© RMFAB, photo: Photo d’art Speltdoorn & Fils, Bruxelles
Quotes

“This fits our Bruegel, whose works I would not call man-made, but rather natural. Indeed, I would call him not the best among painters, but Nature among painters.”

Abraham Ortelius, Epitaph for Bruegel, in *Album Amicorum*, ca. 1569

“Who is then this Bos? Jeroon once more returned
To the world, who, trained with the brush and deft with the stylus,
So imitates for us the dreams of this competent master
That meanwhile he surpasses him as well?”

Domenicus Lampsonius, *Pictorum aliquot Celebrium Germaniae Inferioris Effigies*, 1572

[“Portraits of famous painters of the Low Countries »]

Other projects around the work of Bruegel

The 7 deadly sins

In collaboration with Royal Opera La Monnaie – De Munt

At the initiative of the Royal Opera La Monnaie-De Munt who chose the "7 Deadly Sins" as this season's dramatic theme, the educational and cultural services [EDUCATEAM] of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium illustrate these terrible passions which can occasionally turn into qualities with a thematic journey through ancient and modern art.

The dissemination of this sinful list will indeed find a perfect echo in the musical and visual arts, both in religious and secular subjects. Pride, the ultimate sin, which leads the rebel angels to their downfall in Pieter Bruegel’s canvas resonates with Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*.

The Wrath of *Tamerlano* by Händel comes alive in the grand scenes of martyrs painted by Rubens. Lust will guide us from Bosch’s hellish visions to the depths of Rops, from Khnopff’s animal women to the mysteries of the origins by De Cordier. So many works raise the same questions as those evoked in *Troïka* by Rachmaninov.
Bruegel Box
Immersive Art Experience

The Fall of the Rebel Angels will symbolize the beginning of a series of projections focused on key works from our collections. New technologies allow us to approach them in a new and exclusive manner.

Besides the new possibilities offered, this project is the realization of a profound analysis of current mutations in the museology sector. In this digital era, the Bruegel Box will become an example of the new museological space.

This arrangement allows the spectator to truly enter the universe of Brueghel and to discover his original vision, influenced by Bosch, on a world in full transformation. This imaginary representation, influenced by the cabinet of curiosities and the discovery of the New World, is brought to life before the eyes of the visitor. Thanks to a unique multimedia installation, the visitor is launched into the heart of the untold, effervescent chaos of the masterpiece.

Starts during winter of 2014

Google Art Project

The Fall of the Rebel Angels also received a special treatment – the same that was given to Rembrandt’s The Night Watch [Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam] under the first phase of the Google Art Project. The digital image of this work is comprised of thousands of individual files consisting of nearly a billion pixels. To achieve this, the painting was photographed at night in order to avoid any light interference or vibrations from passing cars on nearby streets. The extraordinary image that was produced reveals the composition’s subtlest strokes. The whole project was followed up closely by our Digital Museum.

> Take a look behind the scenes of the project: [http://tinyurl.com/7okmec7](http://tinyurl.com/7okmec7)

Musée Old Masters Museum

Individual or guided tours to rediscover Bruegel

Rue de la Régence 3 | 1000 Brussels
Tuesday > Sunday | 10:00 > 17:00
WE : 11:00 > 18:00
Closed on Mondays, November 1 and 11, December 25, January 1 and 8

Admission Fees

€ 8 adults
€ 6 seniors
€ 2 youth, people with disabilities and escort, teachers
€ 0 friends of the Museum, ICOM members, children under 5 accompanied by an adult

Guided Tours

Duration : 1h30
Foreign language +12,5€/guide
reservation@fine-arts-museum.be
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