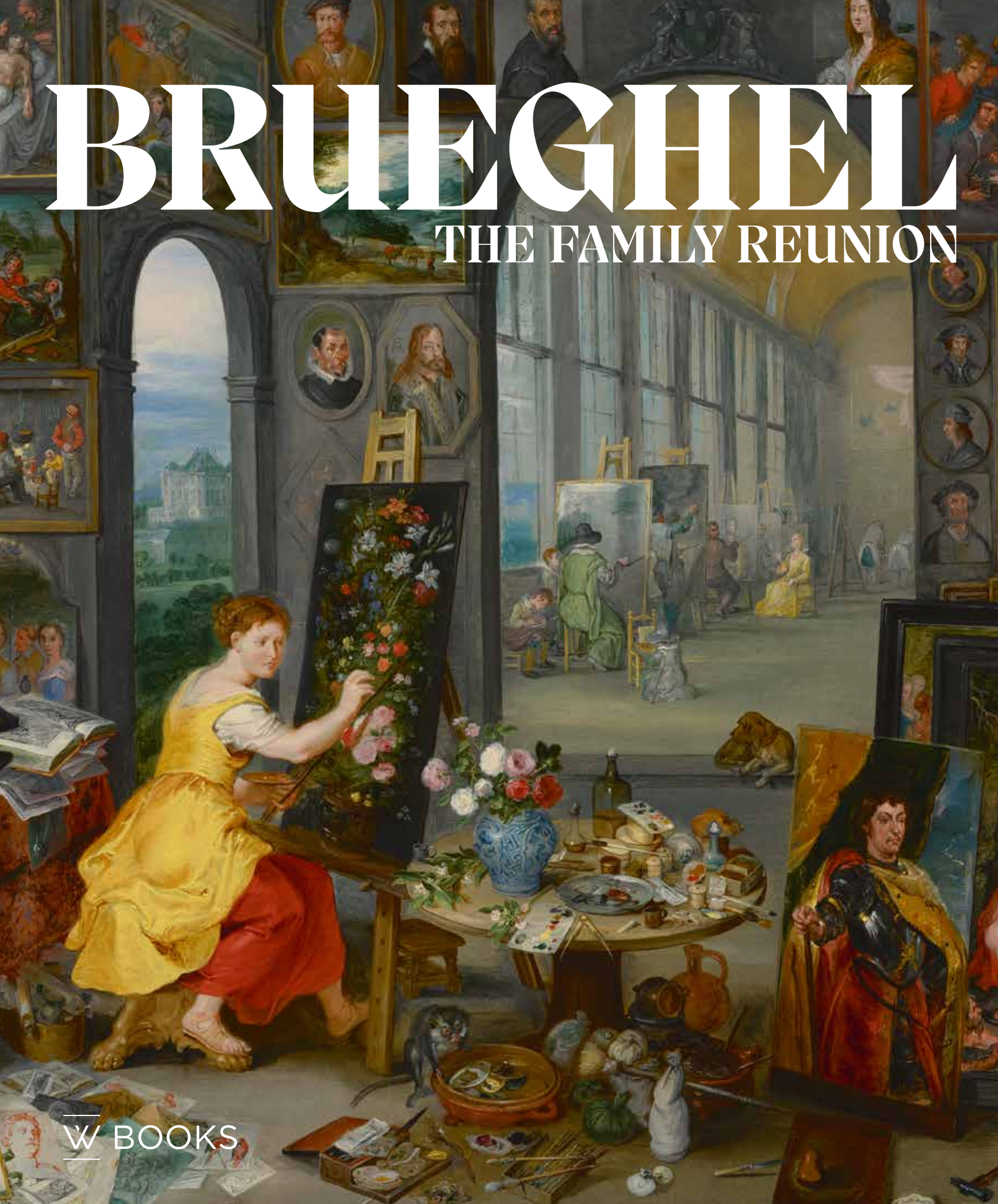


# BRUEGHEL

## THE FAMILY REUNION







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With essays by  
Nadia Groeneveld-Baadj  
Arthur DiFuria  
Christine Göttler  
Sarah Joan Moran  
Marlise Rijks

Het Noordbrabants Museum  
WBOOKS









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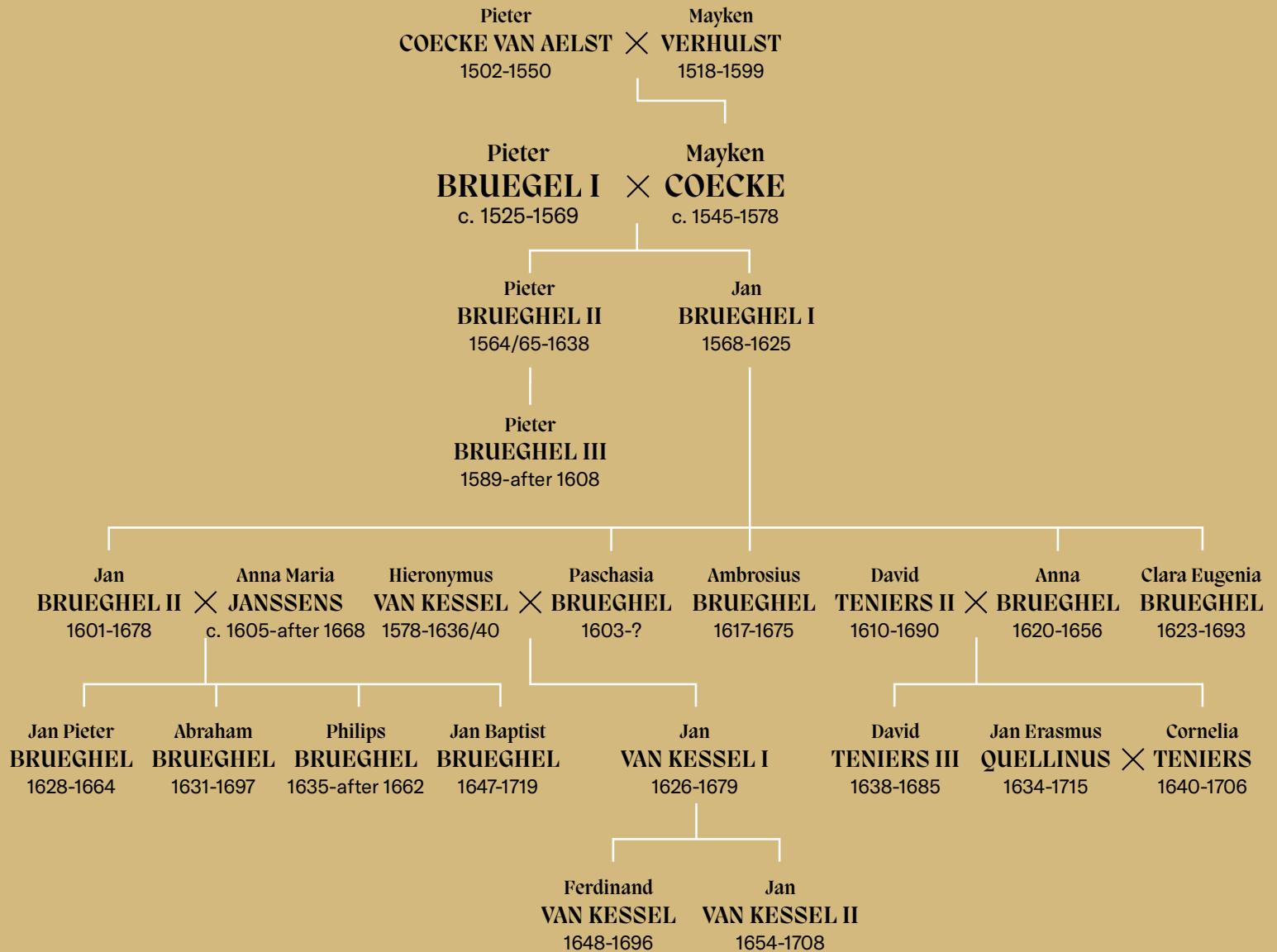






# BRUEGHEL

## FIVE GENERATIONS









# (Re)Framing a Family: Five Generations of Brueghel

Nadia Groeneveld-Baadj

Detail of Jan Brueghel  
the Younger, *Allegory of  
Painting*

Artists with the name Brueghel, also spelled Bruegel and Breughel, played a leading role on the European art scene between 1550 and 1700.<sup>1</sup> No less than five generations of Brueghels produced artworks that are admired for their witty and entertaining compositions, exceptional craftsmanship, and timeless, universal messages. With subjects that include familiar proverbs (**Figure 1**), peasant life (**Figure 2**), stories from classical mythology and the Bible, landscapes, and studies of flowers, animals, and insects, as well as diverse formats ranging from credit card size paintings on copper (**Figure 3**) to monumental canvases, the Brueghels' collective oeuvre surveys many of the major developments in early modern Western art.

The diversity of subjects, styles, media, and techniques, as well as personalities and careers, represented by these artists has until now precluded the presentation of the entire Brueghel family as a coherent whole. *Brueghel: The Family Reunion* takes up this challenge. Rather than a strictly chronological survey of individual artist's

oeuvres, the exhibition employs unifying themes and focused encounters between artworks in order to illuminate the connections and synergies between the different generations.

The exhibition and accompanying catalogue seek to reframe the Brueghel family, focusing above all on its relationship to Brabantine culture, nature, and society, both past and present. Stereotypes are challenged and new avenues for future research are illuminated. For the first time, attention is given to the crucial role of women in the family, including those who made art and those whose knowledge and networks furthered the family enterprise. The significance of the local landscape for multiple generations of Brueghel artists is explored in the context of current concerns about society's interactions with and responsibility to nature. Antwerp's central role in the family business is also looked at anew, with an eye toward the impact of global trade, colonialism, knowledge networks, and collecting practices. These thematic frameworks give both iconic and lesser-known artworks a new context, and they help to make the past present for a broader audience, including those who are introduced to the family for the first time.





[fig. 1] Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *Netherlandish Proverbs*, 1607, oil on panel, 116 x 168 cm Stadsmuseum Lier

Additionally, the exhibition's emphasis on family, in both title and content, encourages contemplation of the diverse connotations of this term throughout history. Across five generations of the Brueghel family, which was not confined to blood or immediate family, exists a broad spectrum of familial structures and relationships. From the all-female Beguine community in which Clara Eugenia Brueghel lived

and thrived to the numerous iterations of godparenthood and guardianships initiated through professional networks, family took on many different forms within the Brueghel clan.

Family dynamics also shaped how artists approached their professional careers.<sup>2</sup> Both Pieter Brueghel the Younger and Jan Brueghel the Younger were eldest sons who lost their fathers at a young age, spent limited or no time abroad, and forged relatively risk-averse careers in Antwerp where they capitalized on the familiar imagery of the previous



generation. This is in stark contrast to Jan Brueghel the Elder, who received his initial training from his famous and professionally well-connected grandmother, Mayken Verhulst, spent significant time painting and networking abroad and defined his career through innovation and collaboration. The diversity and complexity of family relationships in the exhibition encourages visitors to think about how they bear on our conception of family today.

[fig. 3] Jan van Kessel the Elder and Gonzales Coques, *Vase of Flowers with a Portrait of a Man on the Reverse*, c. 1657-1660, oil on copper, 7,8 x 6,3 cm The Phoebus Foundation, Antwerp





[fig. 17] Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Drunkard Pushed into the Pigsty*, 1557, oil on panel, diam. 20 cm. Private collection

collaboratively with other masters, had a profound influence on subsequent Brueghel generations. Following in his father's footsteps, Jan was also one of numerous

Brueghel artists who embraced the lure of Italy. Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Italian journey and the resultant Alpine landscapes are famously described by Van Mander as a process in which the artist swallowed up all of the mountains and cliffs that he saw on his travels and spit them out in his artworks when he returned home.<sup>43</sup> Jan Brueghel the Elder's

formative years in Italy in the 1590s set the stage for his later innovation of subjects, materials, and artistic practice. Almost a quarter century later, he sent his son, Jan Brueghel the Younger, to Italy to give him worldly experience and develop his artistic knowledge. In the second half of the 17th century, Jan's grandson, the still-life painter Abraham Brueghel, forged his entire career in Italy, first in Rome and ultimately in Naples (**Figure 19**). In a fascinating twist of fate, it may have been Abraham's presence in Italy that was responsible for the recent rediscovery of his great-grandfather



[fig. 18] Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *Two Peasants Binding Wood*, oil on panel, diam. 18 cm. Collection Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede



[fig. 19] Abraham Brueghel, *Woman taking Fruit*, 1669, oil on canvas, 128 x 149 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre. Department of Paintings. Gift of André Pereire, 1949





# The Elements, the Seasons, and a World in Flux

Christine Göttler

Detail of Jan Brueghel  
the Elder, *Allegory of  
Air*

**T**oday, the four elements have long since lost their significance in the sciences; the seasons, once believed to be preordained and predictable in their cyclical course, are now perceived as being out of sync. In contemporary art, premodern imageries of physical environments in their seasonal rhythms are occasionally set against a dystopian vision of a future earth that has become inhospitable to humans and other species. But how exactly were such serial images about the properties and processes of life on earth viewed and used in the early modern period? The increase in elemental imagery in the early modern period was part of a growing preoccupation with the workings of nature and the possibility of their perfectibility through new technologies and arts, such as agriculture and mining. At the turn of the 17th century elemental imagery pervaded all media and genres and was found in a variety of spatial, political, and cultural contexts. In princely residences, mythologies of generation and transformation were combined with claims to

sovereignty over the natural world. In *constkamers* and collection spaces the elements and elemental qualities served as ordering principles for the objects on display, defining their place within the unruly dynamics of the sublunary sphere. Painted and printed series of the four elements, seasons, and temperaments offered men and women a means to connect their own lives with nature's everlasting cycles and allowed artists to stage their knowledge of material processes hidden to untrained eyes.<sup>1</sup>

## Coloring the Elemental World

A late 16th-century album compiled by the otherwise unknown Jean de Poligny, now in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, gives some insight into how printed images of the four elements may have been used. Poligny's album includes about 50 hand-colored engravings from several series by well-known Antwerp engravers such as Johannes and Raphaël Sadeler, Adriaen Collaert, and Philips Galle, including the *Story of the First Men* (1583), the *Four Elements* (c. 1582), *Seven Planets* (1585), *Four*





# Antwerp Allegories: World Trade, the Acquisition of Knowledge and the Culture of Collecting in the 17th Century

Marlise Rijks

Detail of Jan Brueghel the Elder and Hieronymus II Francken, *The archdukes Albert and Isabella visiting the collection of Pierre Roose*

**N**o matter how long or how often you gaze at a painting like Jan van Kessel's *Allegory of Sight, with a View on the Schelde in Antwerp* (Figure 44), you will always find something new to

admire. Scrutinizing the painting for the most important details will only lead to the realization that everything is equally important: the coins, shells, and instruments scattered over the floor, the costly objects of gold and silver lying on the table, the chains and rings with precious stones, the sculpture gallery displayed at the rear and in the adjacent room, and the paintings hanging on the wall and standing on the floor, propped up against chairs and tables. Then there are the living beings: the central allegorical female figure with a little boy and two monkeys. And at right a view of Antwerp, the city where Jan van Kessel spent his entire life.<sup>1</sup> Seventeenth-century Antwerp boasted countless collectors' cabinets filled with the kinds of objects that Jan van Kessel so carefully rendered in this painting. Impressive collections of *artificialia*

(objects fashioned by human hands) and *naturalia* (objects deriving from nature) were assembled not only by merchants, doctors, clergymen, and notaries but also by artists and artisans.<sup>2</sup> Pieces that fell in between those categories or belonged in some way to both, such as the decorated nautilus shell in Van Kessel's painting, were considered to be of exceptional value. The diversity of nature was compared to human creativity, to the extent that nature, too seemed capable of jesting: lying near the right edge of the table (just by the monkey) is a mandrake root, prized by collectors because it was thought to resemble the human form.<sup>3</sup> Antwerp was a city where everything was available to those who could afford it: not only diamonds from India, shells from the Indonesian archipelago, and coral from the Mediterranean Sea, but also locally produced jewelry, furniture, and paintings. People met to observe, study, and discuss such objects in collectors' cabinets, which were places where different worlds – art, commerce, natural science, religion – converged and interacted.

The empirical study to which collectors subjected their precious objects made early-modern





[fig. 51] Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Study of Monkeys, a Deer, and other Animals*, c. 1620, oil on panel, 20 x 31 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent

influential Jesuit Joannes David, objected to such accusations, arguing that the true Catholic faith was defined by that very unity of the 'material church' and spiritual belief. All 'material' practices – from statues, paintings, and liturgical vessels to relics, rosaries, and the consecrated host – had both a literal and an allegorical meaning. This was true, for example, of the custom of decorating the church with flowers, which are, after all, part of God's Creation. Moreover, Christ is the 'true flower' ('waerachtighe bloeme'), who strengthens people's hearts and brings the dead to life. Finally, flowers – in all their variety, glorious color, and delightful fragrance – exhort us to 'diverse virtues and good works'.<sup>14</sup>

The Catholic practice of hanging floral wreaths around religious paintings provided the impetus for the new genre of the Madonna surrounded by a garland of flowers. Here a great admiration for the variety and beauty of nature converged with the allegorical view of nature as expressed by the Jesuits. *The Virgin and Child and an Angel in a Garland of Flowers* by Jan Brueghel the Elder and Peter Paul Rubens (**Figure 48**) is a prime example: natural beauty combined with a religious centerpiece intended to exhort viewers to devotion and 'good works'. For Cardinal Borromeo in Milan, the two artists made a similar painting (now in the Prado). In his treatise *Musaeum* (1625), Borromeo wrote the following about this painting: 'Little birds sit amongst the flowers, and the flowers themselves have an exotic appearance, as the artist would certainly not have been content with our usual





ones.<sup>15</sup> Here Borromeo expresses great admiration for the 'exotic' – a general tendency in Europe from the 17th century onwards. The tulip, for example, was still a relative novelty in the early 17th century, as was 'Indian corn' from America. Jan van Kessel's *Triumph of the Eucharist* (Figure 49), for instance, features a garland of flowers with 'exotic' corn, surrounding the typical Catholic theme of the Eucharist, a ritual that was strongly defended in the Counter-Reformation (see also Figure 50).

Furthermore, close scrutiny of the garlands often reveals exotic animals, such as cockatoos, toucans, and monkeys. Jan Brueghel studied these creatures in the zoological garden of the Archduchess Isabella (Figures 51 and 52). Exotic shells also appear again and again, among them the black-and-white checkered *conus*

[fig. 52] Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Animal Study: Donkey, Cats, Monkeys*, c. 1613, oil on panel, 34 x 55,5 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Picture Gallery



# Colophon



This book is published on the occasion of the exhibition 'Brueghel: The Family Reunion' in the Noordbrabants Museum, 's-Hertogenbosch, from 30 September 2023 until 7 January 2024.

## Publication

WBOOKS, Zwolle, The Netherlands  
info@wbooks.com  
www.wbooks.com  
In collaboration with  
Het Noordbrabants Museum,  
's-Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands  
info@hnbm.nl  
www.hetnoordbrabantsmuseum.nl

## Authors

Nadia Groeneveld-Baadj  
Arthur DiFuria  
Christine Göttler  
Sarah Joan Moran  
Marlise Rijks

## Editors

Nadia Groeneveld-Baadj  
Marlisa den Hartog

## Translation

Diane Webb (NL-EN)  
InOtherWords translation & editing  
(EN-NL)

## Image Editor

Helmie van Limpt

## Design

Studio Berry Slok

ISBN 978 94 625 85720 (English)  
ISBN 978 94 625 85713 (Dutch)  
NUR 646

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This book was made possible by generous support from:



Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed  
Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en  
Wetenschap

This exhibition has been supported by the Dutch government: an indemnity grant has been provided by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands on behalf of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science.

