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BRUEGEL THE HAND OF THE MASTER

Essays in Context

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HANNIBAL

Functions of Drawings by Pieter Bruegel the Elder

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In his monograph on the drawings of Pieter Bruegel the Elder, published posthumously in 1996, Hans Mielke reduced Bruegel's drawn oeuvre – including some '*Treue Kopien*' ('faithful copies') – to sixty-seven numbers.¹ Six additional drawings were considered '*Problematische Werke*' ('problematic works').² He also included a list of '*Zu Unrecht Pieter Bruegel zugeschriebene Werke*' ('works wrongly attributed to Pieter Bruegel'), mostly landscape drawings and sheets previously considered studies from nature. A watermark datable to the early 17th century cast the first doubt on this group. He was able to attribute many of these works to Roelandt and Jacob Savery. Prior to Mielke, Frans van Leeuwen and Joaneath Spicer had (independently from each other) come to the conclusion that the so-called '*naer het leven*' ('from life') drawings – traditionally seen as figure studies taken from life – were not by Bruegel and could be attributed to Roelandt Savery.³

Only a few drawings have been newly attributed or reattributed since the publication of Mielke's book. In his 2007 catalogue raisonné of Bruegel's work, Manfred Sellink retained sixty-three drawings.⁴ Notable new attributions have been a sketch with pilgrims in a landscape (in Rotterdam) attributed by Martin Royalton-Kisch, and, more recently, an early landscape drawing (in a private American collection) convincingly attributed by Sellink.⁵ Apart from Sellink's valuable article announcing this new discovery and dealing with the problem

of the dating of the landscape drawings, there are no new discoveries or publications that significantly challenge the image of Bruegel as a draughtsman as introduced by Mielke.

Not only has the sheer number of drawings deemed authentic been drastically reduced, there has also been a significant reduction in the typological variety of the corpus. Figure studies 'from life' are almost completely absent following the exclusion of the '*naer het leven*' drawings. Highly stylised drawings such as *The Gooseherd* and *The Bagpipe Player* (of which various copies also exist) are almost certainly drawn from memory – or '*uyt den Gheest*' ('from the mind') as Van Mander describes this way of drawing⁶ – and it is not entirely clear how they functioned in the creative process.⁷ The figure of the gooseherd was used in a tondo composition representing a proverb, of which several versions – none of which is an original by Bruegel – exist. Whether the original sheet or one of the copies was the direct source for Bruegel himself, or for one of his followers, remains unclear. The sheet with *Four Standing Men in Conversation* (in the Louvre) is perhaps the last example of what figure sketches from life by Bruegel might have looked like, but it is impossible to be sure as there is simply so little material available for comparison purposes or for reconstructing Bruegel's working methods.⁸ While Van Mander asserts that Bruegel had drawn abundantly from nature during his travels across the Alps to Italy, only a few

sheets are considered, with some hesitation, by Mielke as drawings from nature; the *Abbey in a Southern Valley*, the *View of the Ripa Grande in Rome* and the *Valley with a River* on blue-tinted paper.⁹ And in these cases it is also likely that Bruegel executed large parts of the very refined and detailed drawings in his studio, working from sketches made on the spot.¹⁰

Except for the *Landscape with a Deep Valley* and the *Landscape with the Journey to Emmaus*, which are preparatory studies for prints, and the *View of Reggio di Calabria* in Rotterdam – which is clearly a preparatory studio drawing for a detail in the print *Naval Battle in the Strait of Messina* – not a single landscape drawing can be related to any of Bruegel's prints or paintings.¹¹ The function of this large group of drawings is not entirely clear. Some have a very finished appearance and are carefully dated and signed. Some could have been intended as independent works of art. Others are more freely drawn and seem to have been executed very swiftly. Can they be seen as drawings made for daily practice and the sheer pleasure of drawing? The possibility that some of them relate to lost or never completed works should not be excluded, however. Several landscape drawings might not have found their way into print.¹² A gouache of a tree by Bruegel, which is mentioned in the inventory of Giulio Clovio, calls to mind several drawings from the Italian years, most notably those of the so-called 'Lugt group'.¹³

Several types of drawings that we would expect to find in the oeuvre of such a versatile and prolific artist as Bruegel are largely or completely missing. There are, for instance, no figure studies made from life. Also, as mentioned above, the landscape drawings relating to his Italian journey are most likely products of the studio, based on sketches from nature that have not been preserved. It is quite clear that the *Riverscape near Baasrode* in Berlin and the *River Landscape with a Village* in Paris were not drawn directly from a barge in the middle of a river.¹⁴ Both sheets were probably put together at a later point in the studio.¹⁵ In comparison with the *Riverscape with Boats and a Fisherman on the Bank* in the Louvre or the *City at an Estuary* (on the back of the Prague *Landscape with Bears*) they have a far more finished appearance.¹⁶ The question of whether these two latter sketches are made from life or drawn from memory has to remain open.

Composition studies for paintings are completely lacking. The highly finished print designs form the largest group among Bruegel's known drawings. In all probability they must be seen as an end point of a long creative process on paper; we must assume that a large number of detail studies and composition sketches preceded the complex and carefully worked out print designs. As discussed above, the *View of Reggio*, and possibly also the *Ripa Grande*, can be seen as stages in this process. The sheet with *The Hare Hunt* in Paris possibly gives us an idea of how supposed composition sketches might have looked. As Bruegel was himself responsible for the etching, he never turned the sketch into a finished preparatory drawing.¹⁷ In conclusion, we can state that almost all the 'functional' drawings by Bruegel – sketches, studies

from nature, composition studies and so on – have been lost. There are only sparse indications of their character, leaving, unfortunately, ample space for speculation. As a result, Bruegel's working methods must also remain rather obscure.

Furthermore, the materials and techniques used in the corpus are also very limited. It must be said that systematic research is largely lacking, and the literature regularly gives incomplete, erroneous or even contradictory information in this regard. The vast majority of drawings are in pen and iron-gall ink, regularly in different hues of brown and sometimes with parts in carbon ink. In some cases, the brush has been used for hatching as well.¹⁸ A few drawings are made on blue or blue-tinted paper. A single drawing on blue paper in brown ink has washes and highlights in white.¹⁹ This sheet and the *Sailing Boats in the Storm before a City* are visibly underdrawn in black chalk,²⁰ while *The Calumny of Apelles* in London is also washed in brown and grey.²¹ Several of Bruegel's drawings are clearly touched up with washes or highlights by later hands, hampering a correct assessment of their original appearance.²²

The only type of drawing of which a representative number has been preserved, and of which the function is very clear, are the preparatory drawings for prints. The advantage of this group as a case for art-technological and art-historical research is that the authenticity of the vast majority of the sheets has never been doubted. They can be placed in chronological order as most of them are dated, or an approximate date can be deduced from the resulting prints. Recent research by Eva Michel has also shown that many probably share the same provenance. The surviving drawings for the *Vices* series, for instance, seem to have been in the collection of Rudolf II in Prague and moved later to Vienna. It was only during Napoleon's occupation of Vienna that they were taken to Paris and subsequently dispersed to European and American collections.²³

A more thorough art-technical analysis of the materials and techniques used by Bruegel and his imitators and copyists is, in our view, the only way to gain further insight into his work and working methods. The next essay in this volume will explore the possibilities through analyses and imaging of four drawings.

1 Mielke 1996. For a more detailed overview of the attribution history and dating, see: Royalton-Kisch 2001; Sellink 2013, specifically pp. 291–94.

2 Not considered by Mielke as autograph drawings by Bruegel, rather as copies after lost originals. See: Mielke 1996, pp. 70–73.

3 van Leeuwen 1970; Spicer 1970.

4 Sellink (2007) 2011.

5 Pieter Bruegel, *Journey to Emmaus*, c. 1555, pen and grey-brown ink, reworked in pen and grey ink by a later hand, 244 × 371 mm, Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, inv. no. N 86 (PK). See: Royalton-Kisch 2000; Sellink (2007) 2011, no. 99; Pieter Bruegel, *Wooded Landscape with River Valley and Travellers*, c. 1554, pen and dark brown ink, 229 × 335 mm, New York, private collection. See: Sellink 2013; Exh. Cat. Vienna 2018–2019, cat. no. 7.

6 See the use of 'Uyt den gheest' or 'Uyt zijn selven' in Van Mander's *Den grondt der edel vry schilder-const* (introductory section to the *Schilder-Boeck*): van Mander – Miedema 1973, vol. I, pp. 104–5, vol. II, pp. 438–39. See also the lives in the *Schilder-Boeck* of Jacques de Gheyn (fol. 249v^o) or Abraham Bloemaert (fol. 297v^o). On this terminology used by Van Mander see: Melion 1991, pp. 63–66.

7 Pieter Bruegel, *The Gooseherd*, c. 1565, pen and brown ink, 248 × 149 mm, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Kupferstichkabinett, inv. no. C2128. See: Mielke 1996, no. 57. Pieter Bruegel, *The Bagpipe Player*, c. 1565, pen and brown ink, some contours reinforced by a different hand in darker ink, some contours indented, 206 × 146 mm, Washington, National Gallery of Art, Woodner Collection, inv. no. 2016.127.2. See: Mielke 1996, no. 58. For both drawings, see also Exh. Cat. Vienna 2018–2019, cat. nos. 78 and 79.

8 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Four Standing Men in Conversation*, c. 1565, pen and brown ink on brownish paper, 212 × 152 mm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, inv. no. 19740. See: Mielke 1996, no. 59.

9 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Abbey in a Southern Valley*, 1552, pen and brown ink, retouched by later hand with watercolour and washes in grey, 185 × 326 mm, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, inv. no. KdZ 5537. See: Mielke 1996, no. 2. Pieter Bruegel, *View of the Ripa Grande in Rome*, c. 1555/56 (?), pen and red-brown and dark brown ink, 207 × 283 mm, Chatsworth,

The Trustees of the Chatsworth Settlement, inv. no. 841. See: Mielke 1996, no. 14; Exh. Cat. Vienna 2018–2019, cat. no. 18. Pieter Bruegel, *Valley with a River*, 1552, pen and brown ink on blue (tinted) paper, 176 × 294 mm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, inv. no. 19733. See: Mielke 1996, no. 1.

10 Nadine Orenstein has suggested that the sheet with the *Ripa Grande* might be an unused study for a print for the *Large Landscapes* series. In this case its function would have been similar to the *View of Reggio* in Rotterdam. See: Exh. Cat. Rotterdam – New York 2001, cat. no. 8. As Manfred Sellink has rightfully pointed out, this would suggest that Bruegel put together this composition based on lost sketch material after his return to Antwerp, probably around 1555. See: Sellink 2013, p. 303.

11 Pieter Bruegel, *Landscape with a Deep Valley*, 1555, pen and brown ink, 290 × 430 mm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, inv. no. 20720. See: Mielke 1996, no. 24. Pieter Bruegel, *Hilly Landscape with Pilgrims*, c. 1555, pen and brown ink, brush and grey and brown ink, contours indented, 260 × 415 mm, Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, inv. no. T 5098. See: Mielke 1996, no. 24, preparatory drawing for the print *Euntes in Emmaus* from the *Large Landscapes* series. See: Orenstein 2006, no. 56. Pieter Bruegel, *View of Reggio di Calabria*, c. 1560, pen in brown, heavily retouched with brush and brown ink by a later hand, 156 × 242 mm, Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, inv. no. N 191 (PK). See: Mielke 1996, no. 54. Detail study for the print *Naval Battle in the Strait of Messina*. See: Orenstein 2006, no. 48.

12 See for example note 10.

13 See document cited in Marijnissen et al. (1998) 2003, p. 15.

14 Pieter Bruegel, *Riverscape near Baasrode*, 1556, pen and grey-brown ink, 249 × 421 mm, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, inv. no. KdZ 5763. See: Mielke 1996, no. 27; Exh. Cat. Rotterdam – New York 2001, cat. no. 21. Pieter Bruegel, *Riverscape with Village*, pen and brown ink, 202 × 286 mm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, Collection Edmond de Rothschild, inv. no. 3513 DR. See: Mielke 1996, no. 28.

15 See also Sellink (2007) 2011, nos. 37–38.

16 Pieter Bruegel, *Riverscape with Boats and a Fisherman on the Bank*, 1556, pen and brown ink, 151 × 258 mm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, inv. no. 19757. See: Mielke 1996, no. 29. Pieter Bruegel, *City at an Estuary*, c. 1554 (?), pen in brown ink, 273 × 410 mm, Prague, Národní Galerie, inv. no. K 4493 (verso). See: Mielke 1996, no. 22 verso.

17 Pieter Bruegel, *The Hare Hunt*, pen and grey-brown ink, reworked with a brush, using darker brown ink, 214 × 299 mm, Paris, Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, inv. no. 6959. See: Mielke 1996, cat. no. 53. For the correct and more detailed technical description see Cécile Tainturier in Exh. Cat. Leuven – Paris 2013, cat. no. 109a; Exh. Cat. Vienna 2018–2019, cat. nos. 51 and 52.

18 For instance, in *The Hare Hunt* (see note 17).

19 Pieter Bruegel, *Wooded Landscape with a Distant View towards the Sea*, 1554, pen and brown ink with brown wash, white gouache over black chalk on blue paper, 260 × 344 mm, Cambridge, MA, Harvard Art Museums, Fogg Museum, Abrams Collection, inv. no. 1999.132. See: Mielke 1996, no. 7A; Exh. Cat. Rotterdam – New York 2001, cat. no. 14.

20 Pieter Bruegel, *Sailing Boats in a Storm before a City*, c. 1562–63, pen and brown ink, traces of black chalk, 202 × 299 mm, London, Courtauld Institute of Arts, Seilern Collection, inv. no. 11. See: Mielke 1996, no. 52.

21 Pieter Bruegel, *The Calumny of Apelles*, 1565, pen and grey-brown ink, with grey and brown wash, face of Calumnia reworked by another hand in black and brown ink and white gouache, left hand of Calumnia filled in and retouched by another hand in pen and brown ink, 203 × 306 mm, London, British Museum, inv. no. 1959-2-14-1. See: Mielke 1996, no. 63; Exh. Cat. Rotterdam – New York 2001, cat. no. 104.

22 For instance, the *View of Reggio* in Rotterdam (see note 11), the *Abbey in a Southern Valley* in Berlin (see note 9), and *The Calumny of Apelles* in London (see note 21).

23 Michel 2017, pp. 23–25 and 29, note 69.

