Exhibition
Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1625)
A magnificent Draughtsman
Antwerp, Snijders&Rockox House
5 October 2019 – 26 January 2020

In the autumn of 2019 we will organize in the Snijders House the exciting inaugural presentation ***Jan Brueghel the elder (1568-1625), a magnificent Draughtsman***. The exhibition fits in well with the Bruegel-year in Flanders in 2019. Brussels and Antwerp are getting ready in the autumn to put the Bruegel dynasty in the spotlight in a special way.

Until today, no exhibition has been dedicated solely to the drawn oeuvre of Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1625). In the past, his works on paper have largely been presented as supplements to his paintings, and yet it was in his drawings that he introduced some of his most revolutionary artistic solutions to the rendering of landscapes – solutions that were to influence an entire generation of artists in both the Southern and Northern Netherlands. The exhibition is also intended to facilitate further scholarly research around the development of landscape art in around 1600. This has been made possible by the work of Dr Teréz Gerszi and Dr Louisa Wood Ruby, curators of the exhibition, with the assistance of Bernadett Tóth.

Jan Brueghel the Elder, A Coach at the Edge of the Wood, London, British Museum
© The Trustees of the British Museum.

SNIJDERS ROCKOX HUIS

KBC

Considerations

Jan Brueghel the Elder was one of the most prominent and successful Flemish artists in the period around 1600. An innovative and creative thinker, Brueghel modernized Netherlandish landscape art. In doing so, he capitalized on the work of his father, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, above all his drawings, later paintings and prints. Pieter had laid the foundations of entirely new artistic forms – landscape and genre scenes – that became increasingly important in the centuries that followed. While Jan's Italian sojourn (1591–96) was essential to his absorption of foreign artistic achievements, the artistic heritage of his father made the most significant contribution to his own development, exerting a permanent impact both on his artistic approach and execution. The influence of his father's oeuvre – most significantly, Pieter's intimate view of reality – will be prominently demonstrated in the show. This approach later came to characterise seventeenth century Flemish and Dutch art, and was also echoed by German and French artistic circles. Above all, Jan learned from his father's example that in order to represent the simple human environment – the Netherlandish landscape, town and village – a clear and simple composition is the most appropriate choice.

Jan Brueghel, Rom, drawing, Darmstadt, HLMD
© Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, Foto. Wolfgang Fuhrmannek

Structure of the exhibition

Jan's Italian journey (1591–96) was most fruitful in his development of landscape types such as forest views and topographically-correct townscapes, seascapes and city details. This came about partly by studying the works of Matthijs and Paul Bril, as well as those of Girolamo Muziano. Under their influence, Jan experimented with late-Mannerist compositions that were overcrowded and hard to untangle, although these would play only a transitional role in his artistic development. Also significant during Jan's Italian years were his father's drawings of wooded landscapes and the inspiration that he drew from the observation of daily life in and around Rome and Tivoli.

In Antwerp in the first decade of the seventeenth century the artist experimented with different methods of rendering space, namely the orthogonal and diagonal compositions of riverbanks, village scenes and forest roads – a completely new departure for landscape art. Hilly and flat landscape types also emerged in Jan's oeuvre during this period. The new compositional types he developed enlarged the depicted space, rendering his compositions clearer and more suggestive. At the same time, he counterbalanced the abstract quality of his compositions by adding a rich variety of lively motifs, many from figure, animal and bird studies that still exist. It is a characteristic feature of his art that the compositional variations of certain subjects could engage him for long periods. This provides an important perspective for the structure of the exhibition, which will focus on his subject matter.

The exhibition will be made up of six parts that explore Jan Brueghel the Elder's main artistic interests. Memories of his time in Italy, river and village views, roads and travellers, forests, sea and coastal scenes will appear in roughly chronological sequences. It will also be seen how Jan's landscapes become lifelike and animated through his figures, which while not the focus of his artistic production, are clearly much more than mere embellishment or 'staffage'. The show will end on a lively note with a number of Jan's well-known drawings of animals and fruits, together with related paintings.

In addition to drawings by Jan Brueghel the Elder, we plan to include a number of comparative works that will enhance and clarify three aspects of his work; the important examples he followed (including works by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, and Matthijs and Paul Bril), Jan's preparation for his paintings (drawings will be displayed next to the related paintings), and a few of the prints made after his drawings, as prints played a significant role in the dissemination his innovations. An estimated eighty items will be exhibited.

Information: Hildegard Van de Velde, curator Museum Snijders&Rockox House, Antwerp,
hildegard.vandevelde@kbc.be / + 32 3 201 92 71

October 2019